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CHARLEY SKYLARK, THE SPORT.

BY MAJOR HENRY B. STODDARD, Ex-Scout.



AS THE MINIATURE NIAGARA POURED DOWN UPON HIM HE WAS DRENCHED FROM HEAD TO FOOT.

Charley Skylark, the Sport.

A Story of School-day Scrapes and College Capers.

BY MAJ. HENRY B. STODDARD, EX-SCOUT,
AUTHOR OF "GORDON LILLIE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MIDNIGHT SERENADE.

"COME, Lil, wake up!"

"Oh, go 'way."

"I'll yank you out of bed if you don't."

"Just you try it on."

Thud! came the last speaker's head on the floor, and, before he could move, the bed-clothes were piled high on top of him, the pillows thrown on the heap, and Charley Skylark sitting triumphant on the whole, as his roommate and particular chum, Lincoln Arnold—called "Lil" for short—struggled, half-smothered, beneath.

In a few moments the half-smothered lad was released, and immediately, seizing the water-pitcher, soused his room-mate from head to foot, but not doing much damage, as Charley was very lightly clad, and the weather was exceedingly warm.

"Hold on!" stammered Charley. "Quit your shower-bath racket, and get dressed."

"What for?"

"Oh, come, that's played out! You haven't forgotten that we're going down to the college to give the students a serenade?"

"Clean forgot it, Charley, 'pon honor," replied Lil, in a humiliated tone. "I was so sleepy I tumbled right into bed, and in a second dropped off."

"Well, you 'dropped out' soon after; but, come on, sling on your duds, for the boys are waiting down in the orchard."

In a short time the boys, going through the main hall, climbed out of a window onto the roof of the L, for they were in the third story and did not dare go down the staircase for fear of being captured on the way by the principal of the school.

Sliding down the water-pipe at the risk of breaking their necks, they struck the ground in safety and, creeping cautiously under the shadow of the house, reached the orchard, where they found a dozen boys, of all ages and sizes, awaiting their arrival.

In their hands were all kinds of implements calculated to make a noise—tin pans, fish-horns, cans filled with stones that produced a rattling din, keys, shingles and various other articles, all gotten together for the purpose of serenading the college students, between whom and the school-boys there waged an incessant warfare.

By general consent Charley took the lead of the proposed expedition and detailed three of his friends to act as scouts while the main band followed shortly after.

In a short time they arrived near the college building, which was a long, two-story edifice,

having a door in the middle and one at each end, in the wings.

The scouts reported, on their return, that all was quiet and not a light to be seen, for it was now very late and the students had all retired some time before.

Under Charley's leadership the boys then advanced close beneath the college walls and then, at a given signal, the din began.

The discordant tumult was something terrible and calculated to rouse the Seven Sleepers, as it broke out on the perfect quiet that reigned, and in a few moments lights began to shine from fifty different windows, and, the sashes being raised, and heads protruded in every direction, while a shower of missiles—old boots and shoes, chunks of coal, pieces of wood, none of them large enough to inflict any serious injury, were showered down from above, but without causing any cessation of the "music."

Charley was in his element; for, armed with a huge bugle which he had brought from home, he produced the most ear-splitting notes, alternately causing his instrument to bray like a donkey and then to shriek like an insane fog-horn.

Window after window was raised and shouts and threats hurled at the boys, who, indifferent to the dire punishment that was threatened, continued their nocturnal *charivari*, until it seemed as if the whole of Bedlam had broken loose.

At length a sash near the center of the building was thrown violently up, and the voice of the college tutor rose high above the din as, clad in a very light costume, he shook his fist threateningly and yelled:

"Stop! you young villains! Go home at once, or—"

Bang! An apple that was somewhat over-ripe thrown with commendable precision by Charley, took him fairly between the eyes and splashed all over his face, while whatever threat he was about to utter was forever lost in the spluttering of the discomfited mentor, as the fruit splashed in every direction.

A shout of triumph then arose from the merry lads, who shook with laughter at the sight of the tutor's besmeared face, plainly visible in the light of the lamp he held, and they redoubled their efforts to increase the din.

But in a few moments more, sundry figures, stealing along under the shadows of the building, warned the lads that an assault was about to be made upon them, and at a word from Charley, they scattered in every direction and plunged into the woods, closely pursued by the students, who, however, soon abandoned the chase, seeing that it was impossible to catch the light-footed academy boys.

CHAPTER II.

FLIP-FLOP.

In the course of half an hour the boys had all met on the banks of the Kokosing, or Owl creek, as the Indian name had been translated, and there held council as to what they had best do.

They were all opposed to giving up their

night's sport and when Charley, raising his hand for silence, as they were all talking at once, proposed that one of them should go and reconnoiter, the idea was hailed with acclamation.

Each of the boys wanted to be detailed for this duty; but Charley claimed that he had the right to select, and as the expedition was one of some hazard and he would ask no one to go where he would not lead, he proposed to go himself.

After some demur the lads agreed, and, turning over his dignity as captain to his chum, Lil Arnold, Charley started off toward the college, which stood at the top of the hill, after advising the boys to return to school if he did not report in half an hour, for, in that case, he would have been captured by the students.

Circling round the main building, he saw no signs of life, and peering around the corner saw that the square in front of the college was apparently deserted.

So, determining to take matters boldly, he stepped out from his hiding-place and walked quickly out onto what was known as the "Middle Path," and soon came opposite a clump of trees that stood close to the walk, and here saw a number of the students standing, talking together.

He quickened his pace somewhat, but just as he got abreast of the group, a voice called out:

"Hello! Skylark, where are you going?"

"Home."

"Where have you been?"

"Oh, down making a visit."

"Rather late for a young fellow like you to be out; wait a moment and give an account of yourself."

But such was not Charley's plan, and he at once started to run off from the students, when he heard footsteps hurrying after him.

Quickening his pace, he rapidly gained on those who were following him, and, turning to the left, was about to plunge into the woods again, when a tall figure sprang from behind a tree in front of him, and before he could dodge, Charley was grabbed by the collar and hauled off toward the college, a number of students following.

In a short time he was the center of a ring of fifty of the college boys, and was instantly plied with questions.

"Where are the rest?" was the first query addressed to him, and facing the man who put it and who was none other than his captor, the tutor whose face he had plastered with the apple, he replied, laughing all the time:

"Don't you hope you may find out?"

"I'll find out," savagely replied the tutor, "if I have to thrash the knowledge out of you!"

And he flourished a heavy cane he carried, menacingly, while he held Charley tightly by the collar with the other hand.

"No, you won't thrash anybody," spoke up one of the students. "It's all fun, and no one is going to be hurt while I am around."

A dozen voices applauded this speech, and the tutor, seeing that he was in the minority, loosened his hold and sulkily stalked off in the direction of the college, leaving Charley with the students.

"Well, youngster," asked one of them, "are you going to tell us where your chums are?"

"Not much; go and look for them!"

"Might as well look for a needle in a haystack as for those slippery young rascals. Were you one of the crowd that serenaded us?"

"Of course he was!" spoke up a young fellow whose room looked out on the college campus. "He had a big horn, and blew away like a crazy stage-driver."

"That settles it; we'll toss him."

In less time than it takes to tell, Charley's shoes were pulled from his feet, and a large, stout blanket being brought, he was chucked into the middle of it, while a dozen or more stout young fellows took hold of the edges.

"One!" and he was raised a few inches in the air as the students lifted him gently.

"Two!" and he flew up a half a dozen feet, falling back into the yielding surface below.

"THREE!" and with a mighty jerk he sailed high in the air, his arms and legs outstretched, stopped for a moment, and then dropped like lead onto the blanket, somewhat frightened, but entirely unhurt.

Again and again were the motions following one, two, three! gone through with, and again and again was he tossed high in the air, the students, who were experts at the business, being careful to catch him each time as he descended, and not injuring him in the slightest degree.

After he had been tossed twenty times he was released, not having uttered a single sound, while the students—thoroughly good-natured—congratulated him upon his pluck.

And returning to the school he climbed up to his room, where he found Lil snoring away like a buzz saw.

CHAPTER III.

RETALIATION.

WHEN Charley related his experience of the night before to the boys, after breakfast the next morning and before they went into school, he created an excitement that had never been equaled.

The scholars at the boarding-school were of various ages, ranging from ten up to eighteen, and they immediately began to form plans for revenge; their principal threats being directed against the tutor who had captured Charley and threatened to thrash him.

This tutor took his dinner at the boarding-school, every day in the week, exchanging therefor his services as writing-master, so the boys determined to capture him after dinner and give him a lesson that he would remember.

The clanging of the bell called them to the school-room; but little studying was done during the morning, for the boys were too much interested in the approaching episode to give their attention to anything else.

At length the hour of noon arrived, and Charley, accompanied by his chum, Lil Arnold, hurried to his room, which was situated just over the front door, and had a window looking out on the steps below. He had procured an immense can, used in filling the pitchers, that held something like three buckets of water, and

placing this on the window-sill, he crouched down and waited.

The dinner hour was one o'clock, and about ten minutes before that hour the tall, lank form of the tutor appeared, hurrying along the path leading to the front door, reaching which, he rung the bell and turning around was soon lost in contemplation of the fair scene which lay, spread out before him.

But he was suddenly awakened from his reveries, for Charley, quietly tilting the huge can he had filled to the brim with ice-cold water, allowed a chilling torrent to descend on the unsuspecting tutor's head, and as the miniature Niagara poured down upon him he was drenched from head to foot, and the door, being at that moment opened, he stumbled over the sill and fell headlong to the floor, distilling numerous tiny rivulets and gasping for breath at his unexpected bath.

His dinner was spoiled for that day, and he was forced to retire to a room where his meal was sent to him, the principal of the school—who was a large, portly man—loaning him a complete change of clothing until he could return and procure others at his own room.

But Mr. Blake, the principal, had gleaned some information about the proposed revenge of the boys, and advised Martin, the tutor, not to endeavor to leave the house by the front entrance, but to go out by the back way, cut across the fields and reach the college unperceived by the students.

And this was done; but the lads were not to be out-generaled in that manner, and had posted their sentinels in every direction so that as the unfortunate tutor, presenting a most ridiculous spectacle in his borrowed raiment, stole out of the wood-shed and started off on a run, Charley caught sight of him and, giving a yell, took after him briskly, followed in a short time by the remainder of the boys.

Charley followed him over half a dozen fences and across as many fields, until finally the tutor, incumbered by the clothes he wore and which were a world too large for him, stopped, panting, at the foot of a steep hill and waited.

"Good-morning, Mr. Martin," saluted Charley, pleasantly, as he came up. "Going for a walk?"

"Ye—yes," panted the exhausted and frightened man, as he saw thirty or more of the boys scurrying across the field after him.

"Well, wait a little; my friends want to see you."

And shortly the boys came hurrying up, one of them carrying a blanket similar to the one used in tossing Charley the night before, for the boys had decided to punish him in kind, and allow him to experience a slight taste of the discipline that had been inflicted through his agency on their school-mate.

He cringed and cowered, white as a sheet, and his teeth chattering with fear; but in a moment his boots were jerked off and he was in the center of the blanket and tossed high up, his coat-tails flying and his long, lank arms and legs whirling like a wind-mill.

But as he came down the fourth or fifth time, he caught hold of the edge of the blanket, and as it was suddenly jerked upward, he was

yanked, head over heels, and thrown, after a double somerset, onto the turf, where he lay, more frightened than hurt.

The boys were somewhat startled as his body struck the earth with a dull thud, but soon assured themselves that the soft grass had saved him from injury, so they allowed him to rise, and then, taking off his coat they tied his arms behind him, took him back to the Middle Path and then marched him toward the college, where they released him, having fastened a long streamer to his shoulders bearing the inscription:

"A victim of C. Skylark's vengeance!"

And the result was that the tutor was so humiliated and jeered at that he left the college, much to the delight of the students, among whom he was disliked for being a sneak and a spy.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNLUCKY BLOW.

NOTHING was said during the afternoon session, for which the boys returned in ample time; but when they were dismissed at four o'clock, the principal requested Charley to remain a few moments.

"You have been getting into another scrape have you?" inquired the gentleman, somewhat sternly, although he remembered that he had "been a boy himself," as could be seen by a twinkle in his eyes and a half-hidden smile that quivered about the corners of his mouth.

"Nothing very serious, sir," replied the boy.

"I understand that, but you were out very late and hereafter I shall visit your room to see that you are all in bed by ten o'clock. That's all."

And Charley joined his comrades, rejoicing in the belief that "old Blake" had not discovered that they were in the habit of rising when bound on a midnight excursion.

The afternoon was passed in various sports until tea-time came when the boys sat down and did such justice to the meal as only boys can do, until the meal was nearly over.

Hot rolls were an article on the bill of fare, and as the waitress had gone for more and Charley had just finished his, he, without any ceremony appropriated one that belonged to his neighbor, when there was instant war.

The boy who sat next to him was a particular crony of Charley's and occupied the next room to him, but he would not stand this invasion of his rights, and immediately dug his elbow into the young scapegrace's ribs with a force which sent the roll in dispute flying halfway across the room, while Charley administered a sly pinch, which caused the other to yell aloud and lean far back at the same moment so that the principal, seated at the head of the table, might not see him.

And Charley, taking instant advantage of this move, clutched the leg of his chair and pulled heavily, throwing the lad over on his back, where he lay kicking and laughing, for as he fell, he had clutched wildly at the tablecloth and pulled it after him, bringing with it a perfect avalanche of cups and saucers, plates,

knives, forks and spoons which tumbled down with a fearful crash, but fortunately without breaking anything.

"Tom Wilson, what is the matter?" called Mr. Blake from the head of the table.

"Nothing, sir."

"But—"

"I was leaning back and lost my balance."

"Anything broken?"

"Nothing but my head, sir."

"Oh! Well, never lean back in your chair—this practice of tilting is reprehensible, and—"

But Tom was gone as well as the rest of the boys, who had fled at the commencement of what promised to be a long lecture on etiquette.

As soon as they were outside Tom and Charley immediately engaged in a pitched battle, which resulted in Tom's being thrown by the more active lad with whom he was wrestling, but he resumed the struggle undaunted until the appearance of Mr. Blake put a stop to all further hostilities for the time being.

"Never mind, Charley; we'll settle this with a pillow-fight, to-night."

"All right; Lil and I will have it out with you and your chum. But look out; the old man is going to come up to see if we are in bed every night you know."

"I remember."

The two room-mates went into night school, where they pretended to study until nine, when all trooped into the house, a little distance from the school-room, and went to their rooms.

The rooms in the third story were arranged on three sides of a large square hall, and to communicate with each other the boys had pierced holes in all the dividing partitions, so that it was possible to send a message, by passing it along, to any one of the boys on that floor, and through one of the openings thus made Charley and Tom made their arrangements for the coming encounter.

Charley's room was near the head of the stairs, and leaving his door ajar he could easily hear any one ascending, and soon came a thump-thump-thumping that told him Mr. Blake was coming up to visit them; for he wore a cork-leg, and, when about to retire, removed it, using a crutch to walk with.

Instantly Charley's light was out and hissing a warning to the next room, which was passed around, he sprung into bed and covered himself up just as his door opened and the principal stuck his head in.

After visiting the other rooms he apparently descended again and Charley and Lil, arming themselves with their pillows, awaited the coming attack.

He soon heard a slight noise outside, and thinking it must be Tom, Charley, throwing the door wide open, aimed a tremendous blow at a dark figure just before him, and brought his pillow down with terrific force on his head, sending him to the floor with a grunt of rage.

Mr. Blake had stolen back, expecting some pranks from the boy who was never quiet, and, his crutch catching in the matting as Charley struck him, he had been knocked prone on his back, where he lay helpless, the stump of his leg sticking up in the air!

CHAPTER V.

APRIL FOOL.

THE horrified boys quickly assisted the helpless man to his feet and then got a lecture which was the most severe they had ever listened to, and apologized fully for what they had done, when the principal retired down-stairs and the boys returned to their rooms, sending the story circulating about the rooms until the affair was the talk of the third story.

And the next day Charley and Lil were punished by having to do an extra amount of translation, for the other lads got off scot free, as, hearing the voice of the principal, they had wisely kept in bed and had not appeared on the scene at all.

But the principal realized that he had been spying on the lads and as he always taught them never to be mean or underhanded in anything he did, he was not exactly sure that he had "practiced as he preached," and was not very severe in his award of punishment.

Much to the boys' disgust the day was rainy, and their usual half-holiday sports were not indulged in; but Charley and one or two kindred spirits, wrapped themselves in heavy waterproofs and put on thick boots and started out, regardless of the weather, which must have been very bad indeed to keep them in the house.

Hidden under their rubber coats each one carried a large box of blacking and a brush, which they secreted so carefully that no one familiar with them, and knowing the disposition of the boys, could for a moment doubt that they were up to some mischief, had they witnessed their preparations.

Down at the bottom of a hill near by, in a grove of trees which stretched far down the valley, they had built a small log hut, having obtained permission from the owner of the land—Tom Wilson's father—to cut down a few of the smaller trees, and to this they repaired, and, having unlocked the door, entered, and made themselves secure against intrusion by shooting the bolts.

And then they had a royal feast which consisted of a sort of soup which might have been palatable had not they used, in making it, a can of condensed milk, which, sweetened as it was, rather destroyed the flavor of the chicken, potatoes, onions, etc., which composed the mess.

After clearing away the dishes and leaving their brushes and blacking, they again went out into the rain and stole quietly into the school grounds and soon came to their objective point where, in close proximity to each other stood two hollow, cast-iron figures, one representing George Washington, the other Martha, his wife.

The statues, although somewhat heavy, were not too much so to be carried by the three boys, and, one at a time, were carried to their cabin, no one having seen the boys as they lugged off their booty, and once safely placed in the room the two figures, which were painted white, were covered from head to foot with a thick coat of blacking, which changed their appearance completely.

Having finished their artistic labors the boys returned to the house in time for tea, after

which meal Charley sought the study of the principal, on some pretext, and then, leaving the room, which opened into the front hall, fastened a stout string to the wire of the bell, inside, and then chucked it through the transom over the front door. Slipping around he threw the ball of cord up into his window, where Lil caught it and secured it to the leg of a chair, after which the boys read until bed-time and then retired.

But as soon as Mr. Blake had paid his usual nightly visit to their room, they quickly arose, dressed and, by means of the friendly water-pipe were soon outside the building and on their way to the hut, reaching which they took the statues and carried them, one at a time to the garden, and there waited.

The rain had ceased, but it was intensely dark, and at a little distance the two statues looked exactly like two persons, dressed in black, standing among the shrubbery.

Finally all of the lights in the house were extinguished except the hall lamp, which was left burning dimly, and the lads, picking up George and then Martha, carried them to, and placed them upon the front steps, only a pace or two from the door, and there draped them with such clothing as they had been able to scrape together, putting an old felt hat on George's head and an ancient coal-scuttle bonnet over the features of his wife.

Regaining their room, and passing the word so that all the boys on the floor clustered about the windows, Charley pulled the cord vigorously, and the bell, which hung in the hall just outside Mr. Blake's door, rung violently.

They waited for a few minutes, and gave a second tremendous peal, when the thump of the principal's crutch was heard below and the door was flung violently open, while a voice asked:

"What is it you want at this time of night?" as he saw the two figures, dimly visible by the faint light of the lamp, standing in front of him.

There was, of course, no reply, and advancing a little further the principal queried:

"What is it? Are you dumb or drunk?"

And his somewhat quick temper getting the best of him he prodded the male figure somewhat violently with his crutch, and as the hollow iron clang was followed by a yell of laughter from above, he realized how completely he had been sold. It was after twelve o'clock, and was the first day of April!

CHAPTER VI.

A BOLD LEAP.

THE principal laughed heartily the next day when he related the incident, during school hours; but requested the authors of the trick—and he looked sharply at Charley as he spoke—to restore the statues to their normal condition, as he would then ask no questions and investigate the matter no further.

The statues had been replaced on their pedestals, and at noon a dozen of the boys, armed with broom, buckets, scrubbing-brushes, and mops, set to work to remove all traces of the blacking, and with such good results that the statues soon showed no trace of the adventure of the preceding night.

Charley was warmly congratulated by his friends on the success of his practical joke, but innocently claimed that he was much wronged, and that the affair should be laid at some other fellow's door; but all to no purpose. His reputation was too well established in the school, and whether he was mixed up in a scrape or not—and he generally was—he invariably received the full credit of it.

This was his last year at school, for he was to enter college during the following fall, having always led his classes in the various studies, and he determined to have all the fun he could out of his school-days; as he thought, but very wrongly, that when he became a collegian he would become more sedate and settled.

About this time, however, occurred an incident that very nearly put an end to his school and college career both, and it was only owing to his coolness and pluck that he lived to continue his scrapes.

A few days after he had succeeded so admirably in "selling" the principal—Mr. Blake—he was down in the village, strolling about with Tom Wilson, when he stopped on the porch of the hotel to look at a buggy which was drawn up in front, and in which was seated a young girl of probably sixteen.

Charley was a great admirer of the other sex, and the young lady in the buggy was worthy of his warmest praises, being, Charley thought, the most lovely that he had ever seen and sparkling with beauty, health and animation.

She was evidently awaiting some one who was in the hotel, and who appeared to have been absent for some time, judging from the impatience she showed and from the restlessness of the horse.

A planing-mill stood near by, and on this they had just finished placing a new steam-whistle, which promised to give out a tremendous sound. All being completed, the engineer turned on the steam and blew a shrill blast, which startled the horse.

Already impatient, the animal suddenly sprang forward, jerking the reins out of the girl's careless grasp, and started off down the road at a breakneck pace.

The hill was a long and steep one, the road winding its way down until it reached what was known as the "Creek road," which ran alongside the banks of the Kokosing, when it turned abruptly to the right at a sharp angle.

The distance was nearly a mile to the foot of the hill, and a runaway would be almost necessarily fatal, as the steep banks of the creek lay at the bottom, and a frightened horse could not be guided to the right or left, but would inevitably plunge into the waters below.

As the horse leaped Charley sprang forward, and as he was a little in front of the vehicle, succeeded in grasping the top with one hand as the horse darted off, and clung like grim death, while the girl, leaning over the dash-board, endeavored in vain to reach the lines which dangled over the single-tree, and were just beyond her reach.

And so wildly did the buggy sway and rock as the terrified animal plunged madly down the hill, that she barely escaped being thrown out,

and at length desisted, holding firmly to the sides of the buggy and sitting quietly, pale but cool.

She was evidently unacquainted with the course of the road, and did not know the danger that threatened at the foot of the hill.

All this time Charley was trying to clamber into the vehicle, and at length succeeded, a look of relief stealing over the face of the fair occupant as she saw that some one had come to her rescue, and as he told her to sit quiet, she merely nodded, understandingly, and waited.

It seemed miraculous that the light vehicle had not been overturned as the horse flew around the curves of the road, and indeed, it bounded and leaped in a fearful manner; yet Charley, cautiously and rapidly stepping on to one of the shafts, caught hold of the harness and drew himself out on the horse's back, reached the check-rein and pulled heavily. Too heavily; for the bit, weakened by long use, snapped and left him powerless to check the horse's career.

And at the same moment they reached the last bend in the road and swept around in full view of the creek and its lofty banks, while the girl's cheeks blanched a little more at the sight of what seemed to threaten their instant death.

But Charley, scrambling back as best he could into the buggy, holding on to the side of the seat with one hand, encircled the girl's waist with the other, while she, loosening her hold on the vehicle, clung to him; but so as not to interfere with his movements.

And as the horse, sweeping around to avoid the bank, fell and toppled over the brink, dragging the buggy after him and overturning it, the boy, gathering all his energies into one supreme effort, leaped far out over the stream, and with the girl in his arms, plunged, foremost into the water, which closed over their heads.

CHAPTER VII.

CHANGING THE REINS.

IN an instant they rose to the surface, and Charley striking out vigorously, in a few strokes reached the shallow water and thence clambered up on the bank, and laid his fair charge on the turf above.

She was entirely unharmed, and, except for the sudden bath, was uninjured, and murmured a few warm expressions of gratitude to the boy, who had so quickly conceived and executed his plan, while he took the affair as a matter of course and tried to pass it off as being of no consequence.

And shortly afterward Tom Wilson came tearing down the road, followed by a tall, dignified looking gentleman, of probably fifty years, who was evidently the father of the young lady, and who doubtless expected to find his daughter crushed beyond recognition at the foot of the hill.

But as his eye fell on the little group on the bank, he realized that she had been saved by the young fellow who was with her, and, his heart too full for words, he grasped Charley's hand and wrung it so warmly that the boy's fingers tingled for an hour afterward.

And then they all started up the hill together,

some of the employees of the hotel having arrived who began to try and get the horse out, he appearing somewhat injured by his fall, but not very seriously, as the water had broken the force of his tumble, although the buggy was sadly shattered and broken.

On their way to the hotel the girl gave a glowing description of what had occurred and again and again the gentleman wrung Charley's hand until, to use the boy's expression:

"It was as limp as a dish-cloth."

As they neared the hotel the gentleman suddenly interrupted the conversation by turning to Charley and asking:

"But what is your name?"

"Charley Skylark, sir."

"What! Not my son's room-mate?"

"I room with Lil Arnold; is he your brother?" turning to the young lady.

"Why, yes; he has often written about you."

"And he has often told me he had a sister."

"How strange that we should meet in this way."

"But I did not know you were here."

"Neither does Lil."

"We came very unexpectedly, and were about to drive up to the school when the horse decided otherwise; fortunately you were there to interfere with his plans or I do not know what would have happened."

"Yes, my boy; but for you Lulu would probably have now been maimed for life, if not dead," and the man's voice broke from emotion, and he turned away to hide his feelings.

"Oh, any one would have done the same," modestly returned the boy. "But here is the hotel, and Miss Lulu had best retire and rest after her late fright, or rather excitement, for I know you were not in the least frightened."

"Oh, yes I was, horribly; but you will come back to tea?" with a look at her father, who warmly seconded the invitation, so, replying to a look in the deep blue eyes, Charley accepted and pressed the little hand that stole into his so confidently.

And in a few moments the girl had entered the hotel, followed by her father, and Charley, lost in thought, heaved a deep sigh, and joined Tom, who was waiting for him.

Something new had entered into his life, and he was silent and absent-minded during the walk back to school, paying no attention to either Tom's chaffing or his praises, the latter of which were sung in many a high-flown expression.

And as they entered the school grounds, a shout of laughter went up at Charley's woe-begone appearance, for his clothes clung to him like wax, his hat was soaked and his face covered with stains which had trickled from his blue hat-band.

But the cries of derision were soon changed as Tom related the adventure, and while Charley, in his room, was removing his apparel and making himself presentable, Lil burst into the room and nearly hugged Charley to death.

"Why, you dear old boy!" he cried, "what a brick you are, to be sure. I always wanted you to know my sister, and now you have saved her life."

And Lil danced an impromptu hornpipe that

resulted in shaking the ceiling below to such an extent that it nearly fell to the floor.

And then Charley held a reception, the principal being one of the first callers to congratulate him, while Lil disappeared to hurry to the hotel to see his father and Lulu and to tell them what a splendid fellow Charley was, in which statement they seemed to believe implicitly.

And about five o'clock the ancient buggy belonging to the principal was placed at his disposal, the horse being driven by an aged colored man who answered to the name of "Rube," of whom Charley was an especial pet, despite his numerous escapades.

And the boy, pretending to fix the bridle, slyly changed the reins on the bit, and then said he would walk to, and open, the gate.

When, immediately, there was a circus. The old man pulled on the right rein and the horse immediately turned to the left, and wheeled around, as the old darky continued to haul, until the buggy was nearly overturned, amid exclamations from the driver of:

"You, Pete! wha's you gwine? Whoa da! You, Massa Chawley, wha'—wh'—what you been up to? You wufless, you's always projectin'!"

While Charley stood off, convulsed with laughter, but finally arranged things, and was driven off in triumph to the hotel.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.

THAT evening was the beginning of a new era in Charley's life.

He found the Arnold family awaiting him, Miss Lulu looking more lovely than ever in her evening dress of some soft, clinging, white material, which clung to her as though it loved the form it enveloped; while her face, slightly pale from the nervous strain of a few hours before, was as delicately beautiful as the unspotted lily.

And when, after their tea, Mr. Arnold and Lil having gone to the school to call on Mr. Blake, Charley was left alone with the girl, and they, seated on a little balcony which overlooked the road down which they had plunged, talked of a thousand different things, the charm of the surroundings and of her presence stole into his heart, and he began, with all of a boy's impetuosity, to believe that life without a hope of seeing Lulu again would be a blank and not worth living any longer.

But the time came when he must say "good-night" and "good-by," for the Arnolds were to leave the next morning early, taking the first train from Mt. V—for the East; but pressing invitations were extended Charley to visit them during the vacation, which he accepted.

He was blue and dispirited all the next day; but this was attributed to the excitement of the afternoon before, and only Lil, to whom he spoke continually of Lulu, suspected the true cause of his want of spirits.

But in a day or two he had somewhat recovered his wonted buoyancy of spirit, and was ready to attend the meeting of the secret society to which he belonged and of which he was the president, for there was to be an initiation

that night and it was necessary that he should be present.

Their lodge was a couple of miles away in the woods, situated in a deep hollow, where they had a log cabin, built by contract, and which was reached by a long, devious path, difficult to follow after dark except to those very familiar with it, to whom it was well-known as any high-road.

A young fellow named Harry Neville had been voted on and elected as a member at their last meeting, and him they were to initiate that evening; so, about eight o'clock, Charley and the rest of the boys having preceded them by an hour or so to perfect the arrangements, Lil Arnold and Tom Wilson set out in charge of the candidate, and, reaching the edge of the forest, blindfolded him, and then, each taking an arm, they started off to lead him to the lodge.

The journey was made as long and as trying as possible, and the new boy stumbled over as many obstacles as they could find in his path, until finally they arrived at the little clearing in front of the cabin, and there left him standing, with injunctions not to remove the bandage from his eyes, under pain of instant rejection, after which they entered the hut.

Here they found Charley and the rest of the boys, and, taking a coffin that was kept for such times, they went out, and, seizing the unresisting youth, who was slightly alarmed at the prospect of what was to follow, they placed him in the pine box at full length, and immediately fastened the lid down, a few holes pierced in the cover serving to furnish air.

He was then lifted and carried for what seemed to be a long distance, amid the most profound silence, and then, ropes being placed around the coffin, he was lowered into a grave, and there left, helpless and alone, while the clashing of swords sounded about the grave and gradually withdrew as the boys moved off.

It seemed to him that he thus lay for hours, and it was with a feeling of terror that he began to think that the boys had forgotten him, when suddenly there sounded a report over his head, followed by a deep groan and a heavy fall onto the coffin-lid, while something warm trickled down on his face, and sundry exclamations of horror convinced him that some accident had happened and that one of the boys had been seriously injured.

But the groans ceased, the body was apparently lifted from the grave and then the sound of retreating footsteps again became audible and again he was left alone, shivering with fear.

But they soon returned, talking of the accident, and blaming one of their number for his carelessness, while Neville, being released, but still blindfolded, was marched to the door of the lodge, ushered into the main room, and then a solemn voice said:

"Henry Neville, by an unfortunate accident our proceedings have been interrupted, and our president fatally hurt; over his dead body swear that you will never divulge a thing concerning this evening's experience!"

And the cloth being taken from his eyes Neville saw, lying before him, covered with a white sheet to the chin; his eyes closed and held

down by silver half-dollars; his face as ghastly as if dead for some time, so pale and marble-like was it; a large clot of blood on his right temple; while a half-dozen lights burned dimly and mysteriously about the bier, Charley Skylark, apparently cold in death.

And as the candidate realized the awfulness of this sudden tragedy, he, faithful to what he had promised when invited to join the society, faintly murmured:

"I swear!"

And fell insensible to the floor.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE BED.

WHEN he fully recovered his senses he was in pitch darkness, and, although his hands and feet were free, he could not move an inch, being placed in a small, narrow, upright box, which inclosed him more than if he were still in the coffin.

And he stood thus for a few moments, recalling the vivid picture of a few minutes, or hours, before—he knew not which, listening for any sound that might betray the presence of some human being near; but all was silent as the grave, and he felt decidedly nervous and uncomfortable.

He was young—not more than fourteen—and a visionary, excitable lad, of an extremely nervous disposition, and with an exceedingly vivid imagination, so that in a few minutes he had conjured up all sorts of horrible thoughts and almost persuaded himself that he was hermetically sealed in some unknown vault, that he might not appear and denounce the murderers of Charley Skylark.

But just as it seemed to him that he could restrain himself no longer and must call out to relieve his brain from this terrible incubus that pressed upon it, like some terrible vision that occasionally visits one in his dreams, the board which he faced suddenly fell from before him and a push from some unseen force behind causing him to step suddenly forward an obstruction placed about the height of his ankles caused him to pitched headlong forward into the black darkness below, and before he fully realized what had happened, he fell, with a tremendous splash, into a pool of water below, in which he was soured from head to foot and wet through and through.

In a moment he had regained his feet and stood up, finding, much to his relief that the water was not more than chest deep, and as he cautiously advanced one foot, it encountered an incline up which he walked gingerly until he stood clear of the water when a bell sounded a loud peal, a trap above was opened and a shower of something soft fell down and covered him like falling snow, while, at the same moment a flood of light burst into the apartment and all around him stood the eight members of the society, while he saw that he was covered from head to foot with flour, presenting a most ludicrous spectacle, his comrades pointing their fingers and jeering at him amid loud peals of boisterous laughter.

He had been warned to put on a suit of clothes which had been furnished, and which were made of white linen, so that he was one mass of

white from head to foot, while the sticky mass glued his hair to his head and filled his nose and mouth so that he coughed and gasped as if choking.

But he was relieved to see, standing just in front of him, Charley Skylark, and realized with an intense feeling of satisfaction that he had been completely deceived and that the boy was entirely unhurt.

Then Lil and Tom took him by the hand and led him to an adjoining room where there was a bath and where he found a complete change of his own clothing, and he was left to repair damages, being told to knock on the door when ready.

In a short half an hour he had completed his ablutions and, having given the signal after dressing himself, was again led out and ushered into a large hall, in the center of which a table was spread and where a short speech was made to him by Charley, who welcomed him as a full member, told him the motto of the society and giving him the grip, took him around the circle, where he shook hands with each of the boys and was then installed in the seat of honor on the right of the president.

The supper was excellent, and Charley explained to him how he had produced his ghastly appearance by the aid of a little flour, the blood of a chicken and the burning of alcohol mixed with a little salt, which would cause any one to look like a corpse.

And Harry confessed that he had been much worried, but admitted that he was a little ashamed of his weakness, being comforted, however, by the assurance that they had all acted in the same way.

He was then shown around the lodge, and learned that many other tricks could be played on the candidates, besides those he had experienced, showing that the resources of the society were numerous and varied.

A delightful evening was passed, with music—for the lodge boasted an upright piano—songs and conversation, until at length they broke up and wended their way home, reaching the school shortly after twelve o'clock, and went to their rooms undisturbed, for the principal allowed them to hold their society meetings every two weeks, on Saturday night, provided they got home by one o'clock, which they were always careful to do, as they prized their society evenings beyond all others.

Harry Neville was full of his night's experience, and could talk of nothing else to his chum, who was also a member of the "Gamma Nu," as the society was called, after the initials of the Greek words which composed its motto, and talked for a long time before retiring; but hearing a noise outside, and fearing it was the principal, he pulled down the bed-clothes and jumped in, blowing out the light first.

Instantly there was a howl of anguish, and, as if propelled by a spring, he bounded out on to the floor and stood there, uttering a prolonged "ouch!" while his room-mate laughingly asked what was the matter.

An investigation showed that Harry's bed had been liberally strewn with chestnut burrs, saved from the preceding fall, and the sharp prickles on them, piercing the under sheet, had

penetrated the tenderest portion of his anatomy.

But clearing them out, and consoling himself with the thought that it was part of the initiation, he again tumbled into bed and was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER X.

AN HONEST CONFESSION.

THE days rolled on, and Charley watched the approach of the date when the summer vacation would begin with intense satisfaction; for all his plans were laid to accompany Lil Arnold to his home and there remain for some weeks.

But he continued his tricks, naturally, and was always at the bottom of any scrape that was on hand, escaping detection by the merest chance, although invariably suspected by the principal, who, however, never questioned the scholars, as he did not countenance tale-bearing, and so long as the pranks played were harmless, did not care to interfere.

But the boy once overstepped the limit of the principal's patience, and found that he was caught in his own trap.

It happened in this way:

The school-rooms were in a building by themselves, situated a little distance from the house, and consisted of four apartments, two on the ground floor and two over them in the upper story, the latter being reached by a somewhat steep staircase leading from the hall below.

One night, when it was dark and stormy, and the beating of the rain against the windows drowned every other sound, Charley, Lil and Tom left their rooms, and by means of their usual descent, reached the yard, whence they proceeded to the stable where the old horse belonging to the principal was kept.

They easily unlocked the door, and entering the stall, led the horse out, covering him with a blanket to protect him from the rain, and proceeded to the school-rooms, and muffling the hoofs of the animal, led him into the hall, and then, slowly and cautiously, began to lead him up the staircase, which was a matter of extreme difficulty, as the steps were rather steep and the horse could scarcely be induced to walk up; but after a long time they succeeded in getting him to the top and into one of the rooms, where, on a slightly-raised platform was the principal's desk and chair.

They then fastened the horse to the desk, raising the lid of the latter and placing a goodly supply of oats and hay therein, after removing the articles it contained, and placed a bucket of water on the platform alongside the astonished animal, and there left him after a time, complacently munching his fodder and as much at home as if he were in his own stall in the old barn.

The door was carefully locked and the three boys then regained their rooms undetected, and slept the sleep of innocence and an easy conscience, until they were aroused by the first bell for breakfast, when they dressed and descended to their morning meal as unconcerned as if nothing extraordinary had kept them up so late the night before.

The breakfast hour was half-past seven, and

after that meal the boys did about as they pleased until nine, when they were called to their studies, the principal going to the school-room about half an hour before the time for opening, and reading or writing until the hour for ringing the bell arrived.

It was with some astonishment, therefore, that the boys heard the bell ring at least half an hour before they expected it, and knowing that something unusual had happened, they hurried to the large room down-stairs, where prayers were held, and seated themselves in their accustomed places, awaiting what the principal might have to say.

He finished the usual morning exercises before referring to what had caused him to thus summon them in advance of the hour, and then requested the boys to follow him to the room overhead, he preceding them and opening the door, when they tumbled in after him, and as each one entered another peal of laughter was added to the chorus commenced by the first-comers, until a perfect shout went up and shook the roof.

For standing sleepily there, with his eyes half-closed, and an occasional lazy twitch of his tail, stood Old Pete, nibbling the last blades of hay that were scattered about on the platform.

But silence was soon restored, and the principal, addressing them, said he was compelled to question each and every one as to who was the author of this trick; for, said he:

"Time and expense will be necessary to get the horse out again; you can bring an animal up-stairs, but it is impossible to make them walk down steps unless trained. You will, as your names are called, rise and state whether you did this, or know who figured in the escapade."

"Stop, sir!" cried a voice, "I will save my schoolmates this humiliation; I did it!" and Charley Skylark stood up boldly and faced the principal.

"And I!"

"And I!"

And as the two voices rung out, Lil and Tom left their seats and stood alongside their friend.

"Thank you, boys," quietly remarked the principal; please remain, I wish to see you; the rest can go; I give you a holiday."

And in a few moments the room was vacant except for these four, and the principal said:

"Boys, you have been honest, and I forgive you!"

CHAPTER XI.

PAINTING THE PIGS.

FOR a moment the three lads stood there blushing like fire and then the principal continued:

"I am glad to see that you are honest enough to confess and not try and escape by falsehood.

"You have done a foolish thing without reflecting on the consequences, and all I ask is that you rectify your mistake and restore Old Pete to his stall.

"You will, of course, not think of leaving the grounds until you have finished your work, unless it is to procure assistance, for I shall not allow it."

The principal then left them and they stood there looking sheepishly at one another, until all three burst into a simultaneous roar of laughter and began to consult as to what they had best do.

"We'll go and get old man Leonard, the carpenter, to come and help us," at length cried Charley.

"I reckon the stairs will have to be covered with boards with cross-pieces nailed on them, and we can help if Leonard will direct."

"A good scheme! I'll go and hunt him up and get him to come with lumber," said Tom, and he hurried off, leaving Lil and Charley together, but soon returned with the old carpenter, when they all set to work with a will, and the stairs were soon covered, strips being nailed across the planks, and then, they being covered with a thick mass of hay, Old Pete was led down in triumph, treading very slowly and gingerly, while the boys stood about and laughed at the practical jokers and the sorry ending of their scheme.

But by dinner-time all trace of their work had been removed and the carpenter paid for his trouble, the latter portion of the settlement completely "strapping" the three lads, who were not very flush, and doing more than anything else to teach them the lesson of looking before they leaped.

Yet they enjoyed their half-holiday despite this terrible fizzle and stood higher than ever in the estimation of their friends and companions for the truth and courage in confessing their fault, rather than lying out of it and placing all the boys under suspicion and the principal to trouble and expense.

When the lights were out that night, the three irrepressibles were in Charley's room and whispering together.

"What do you think of it, Charley?" asked Tom, regarding some proposition that had been made.

"I say let's go ahead."

"No harm can come of it and it will be lots of fun. We cannot injure any person or anything, so let's set out."

The other two agreed and taking some mysterious and suspicious-looking bundles under their coats they were soon outside and out of sight of the house.

Then they struck off down the hill and walked rapidly until they came to a small, low shed, the door of which was fastened only by a hasp and a pin, and opening it they stepped inside and Charley threw the slide of his dark lantern back, the light which shone out being greeted with a deep grunt.

Closing the door they unwrapped the parcels they had which proved to be cans full of paint, red, white and blue, while each one of the boys had a brush with which to apply the colors.

The shed they were in was used as a sort of store-room for odds and ends and contained a pig-sty where Mr. Blake was raising some little porkers that he had purchased a short time before, they being of the Berkshire breed and almost white.

One of the boys seized the nearest of the little fellows by the hind leg, and, unmindful of his squeals, lifted him out onto the floor and held

him firmly, placing his head in a rack to drown his cries, while the other two began to decorate the pigling, with the colors they had brought.

A magnificent American flag was painted on the first one, the stars being artistically scattered about his shoulders while the stripes meandered gracefully down his back.

He being disposed of they then took a second and a third, displaying their artistic taste by varying the figures on each, making circles, squares, triangles and stars, besides various other figures, until the eight pigs looked as if dressed for a masquerade ball.

They then dumped them in a light cart and hauled them up to the front door, where they deposited them quietly as they could, closing the lattice so that they could not escape, and the porkers, which had been rather obstreperous, settled down in a heap in the corner and grunted themselves off to sleep.

And next morning Charley slipped down and opened the front door, and let the pigs into the hall, going out and closing the door after him and reaching the breakfast room just as they all sat down.

A door opened from the dining-room into the front hall and soon sundry gruntings and sniffings attracted the principal's attention, and he rose and opened the door, just as a little dog, the pet of the house, began to bark furiously outside.

And as the door was opened a tremendous squeal broke on the air as one of the pigs was bitten on the hind leg, and the whole drove burst into the room, running against the principal's legs and laying him flat, and rushed about the room, squealing and grunting, while the barking of the dog and the shouts of the boys added to the din.

And at sight of the decorated pigs, gaudy in their flaunting colors, even the stern face of the principal relaxed until amid a general laugh, they were driven out, quiet was restored and their breakfast was finished in peace.

CHAPTER XII.

AN INTERRUPTED EXPEDITION.

A FEW days afterward, the boys were practiced in the skirmish drill, for it was a semi-military school, and they were drilled every day for a couple of hours.

In the afternoon, shortly after the drill, Charley and one of his friends were walking about the village, when one of them proposed that they should go and have a saucer of ice cream, which suggestion was adopted and they proceeded to Ma'm Sawyer's where they were soon seated in one of the stalls, enjoying their cream and cake, bidden by the curtain which hung over the entrance, when the door opened and footsteps were heard as two of the college students entered and seated themselves in the stall adjoining the one the two boys occupied.

Having ordered, and received, some refreshment the two new-comers began to converse in low tones:

"What time shall we start?" asked one of them of the other.

"Blake does not have the lights put out until about ten o'clock," replied the other, "and we had better not get there before twelve."

"How many of the boys are going?"

"Including ourselves there will be six of us."

"And you think we can get some melons?"

"Oh, the garden is full of them, and we will have no difficulty in getting all we want."

"Is there a dog about the place?"

"Only a little house dog, that won't bother us."

As may be well imagined, as soon as they heard their principal's name mentioned the boys were all attention and did not lose one word of the conversation; but suddenly one of the students said:

"What fools we are! May be there is somebody else in the room, who has overheard us."

"Let's take a look."

Instantly Charley slipped from his seat and noiselessly crawled under the bench on which he had been sitting, his example being followed by his friend, and as the material with which the seat was covered hung down over the front edge, they were pretty well hidden, and lay perfectly quiet.

The curtains which hung in front of the stall were then gently pulled apart, and one of the students looked in, and, seeing the empty saucers on the table, said to his companion:

"We're in luck! some one has just left here. If we had been ten minutes sooner, we might have been overheard, and our scheme for to-night have been completely spoiled."

"There is nobody in the room; but let's get back to college and see the other boys about where we shall meet and at what hour."

In a few moments they had paid their bill and departed, when Charley and his friend crawled out and, after waiting a short time, until they thought the students were out of sight, settled in their turn, and then went back to the school.

Seeking the principal, Charley related to him what he had overheard, and requested that he might be allowed to stand guard with five of his companions, their guns to be loaded with blank cartridges, that they might give the students a first-class fight; and to this the principal agreed, placing the entire matter in Charley's hands, but warning him to be careful not to hurt any one.

Charley promised faithfully, and then seeking out his intimates, he informed them of what had happened, instructing them to meet him in the drill-room, situated in the basement, at eleven o'clock, and cautioning them to preserve the utmost secrecy, all of which they promised faithfully.

At the appointed hour, therefore, the boys assembled in the drill-room, where the guns were kept, and each one armed himself, Charley taking particular care to see that the guns were only loaded with blank cartridges, and that the bayonets, which were fixed on the rifles, were furnished with large corks, used to prevent any injury while practicing the bayonet exercise.

Then they marched to the garden, situated a few hundred yards from the house, and by half-past eleven they were stationed at their posts, being scattered about and ordered to lie close and in any event not to fire until they were certain of some stranger's approach, and then to discharge their weapons in the air.

And then they waited until the clock of the college in the distance tolled out twelve solemn strokes, and they knew it was midnight.

As the sound of the last stroke died away on the air, Charley, who was crouching low at the brow of a somewhat steep incline, saw a half-dozen indistinct forms steal out of the wood below and crawl up the hill; so quietly passing the word, consolidated his forces at the point where he was stationed, and ordered them to quietly cock their guns.

And as the students—for it was they—got within twenty paces of the boys, at the whispered word the guns were raised, and as one report the six shots rung out with a thundering noise, startling the echoes and frightening the college men so that they turned and scampered down hill, in full flight, pursued by the boys, who jabbed them in the backs with their cork-protected bayonets until more than one of the students toppled over into the swamp below, whence they were dragged by the boys, in a much bedraggled condition and sent back to the college, dirtier and wiser men, while Charley marched his command back in triumph.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SALUTARY LESSON.

"WHO'S the new boy, Charley?" asked Tom Wilson of his friend a morning or two afterward, as they were seated at breakfast.

"Don't know him," replied Charley, casting a glance at a pasty-faced youth, who was eating a few seats from him: "Lil does, though, and told me his name was Richland."

"He swears if any one tries to haze him he will use his revolver; guess we'd better put him through."

"Think so myself; any boy who acts rusty should be smoothed down. Where does he room?"

"Opposite me; we'll call on him this evening if you say so."

"All right."

The "new boy" was watched with interest during the day, and made himself very much disliked, in recess hour, by striking a little fellow, much smaller than himself, a severe blow, for accidentally running into him while chasing another boy.

Charley was about to interfere when the bell rung calling them into school again; but he muttered to Tom as they took their seats:

"That snoozer's too starchy; we'll take some of it out of him to-night."

"Good enough! I'm with you. I'll come to your room and we'll get up a scheme."

"All right; come in about nine, and I'll have Lil there, and we'll see what we can do for the young gentleman."

After night school the boys went to Charley's room, and carefully closing the door, consulted as to what had best be done, finally arriving at a conclusion, and sending Lil to the new boy's room to prepare the preliminaries.

Lil entered the room opposite, and bidding Richland good-evening, at the latter's invitation sat down and began to talk to him.

The new-comer was a lad of perhaps eighteen,

and was tall, raw-boned and muscular, having a wicked look about his eye, and a set mouth and skin that denoted obstinacy and aggressiveness.

"I understand," said he, "that the fellows here are in the habit of hazing any one who comes, and as you probably know them, you can tell them you know *me*, and what you have seen."

And opening his trunk he took from it a small silver-mounted revolver, with every chamber of the cylinder loaded, and after showing it to Lil, placed it in his hip-pocket with a flourish.

"I'll use that in a minute on any one who tries to be too fresh; see if I don't."

"Oh, come now, Richland, you wouldn't shoot any one who tried to haze you?"

"Well, you just let 'em try it; they'll get more than they expect."

"I wouldn't be rash; but that's not what I want to talk about."

"We're going out on a little raid this evening, and if you are fond of melons, you had better join us; for we expect to get a lot."

"Oh, I'll go!" answered the other, eagerly.

"What time do you start?"

"In about an hour; I'll let you know. You'd better get into bed now, for old Blake will be up pretty soon on his rounds and your light ought to be out, so that he won't suspect anything."

"All right; come for me when you are ready."

When all was still Lil rapped on Richland's door and whispered to him to come on, when he cautiously issued into the hall, and following Lil, was soon clambering down the boys' dangerous ladder to the ground, where he saw a half a dozen youths assembled, and as he reached the bottom a hand was thrust into his pocket, and the pistol whipped out before he realized what was happening, while a huge sack, thrown over his head stifled his cries, and the boys, flinging themselves upon him, held him firm, despite his struggles, and soon tied him fast, so that he was powerless to free himself, and then marched him off, half-dragging, half-pushing him along.

They walked him thus for over an hour, he stumbling and half falling along, over the rough road they followed, being finally halted, and then lowered over the edge of what, from the whisperings of the boys, he thought must be the bank of the creek, and being told to grasp a projecting root or be allowed to fall, he clutched the morsel of wood and hung on desperately, when the boys released their hold and left him hanging there.

Minute after minute passed and his strained muscles began to grow weak and painful, while he cried again and again for help, his calls being muffled by the sack which still hung about his head, while he tried in vain to draw himself up.

At length his strength was completely exhausted and with a cry of fear he loosened his hold and dropped down into the unknown depth below.

There was a splash and a yell, followed by a burst of laughter from the boys who had quietly stolen back and now stood around him; for he had dropped about ten inches into a foot of water,

but so frightened was he that as he struck, his knees gave way and he fell flat on his face in the stagnant water at the bottom of an old disused cistern, at the edge of which the boys had placed the rough piece of wood by which he had hung.

When the hazers had somewhat recovered from their fit of laughter, Richland was dragged out and marched to the college gates, on each side of which stood a high stone post and on one of these he was placed, with his hands and feet tied, and carefully blindfolded, and there left with a caution not to move as he would surely fall the ten or fifteen feet to the ground, when the boys again left him, this time going home and retiring, saying among themselves that anyone who came to that school prepared to murder people was apt to get the worse of it.

CHAPTER XIV.

A RESCUE.

WHEN the college students came trooping down the Middle Path, the next morning, on their way to breakfast, after chapel, they saw something standing on one of the pillars of the gates, which seemed like a statue, so motionless was it, but as they approached they perceived it was a human figure, but so bedraggled and covered with dirt that it was almost impossible to guess the original color of clothes it wore.

Cords were wrapped about its arms as far as the elbows, and about its legs up to the knees, yet not so tightly as to cause any pain, but holding the boy firmly enough to prevent his using his limbs, so that he could neither kneel nor sit down, and had been compelled to stand erect all night.

And the more boisterous of the students began to hoot and yell at him, realizing that it was part of his initiation, until some of them, thinking that he had been there long enough, clambered up and released him, but he was so stiff from his long watch that he had to be assisted to the ground.

Hanging about his neck by a cord was his pistol, unloaded, and with a nail tightly driven into the barrel and each chamber of the cylinder, while a placard, fastened on his back, announced:

"This boy threatens to shoot anybody who tries to haze him. Look out, he is dangerous!!!"

This sarcasm brought out shouts of laughter, while the boy, in the midst of the jeering crowd, felt as if he would give anything to be able to sink into the earth out of the sight of them all, until finally a big, good-natured, brawny collegian, pushing his way through the crowd, came close up to him and said:

"Young fellow, this will be a good lesson to you."

"If you had not uttered those idle threats you would have gotten off much more easily; it don't do to try and scare a lot of schoolboys, or to set yourself up against your companions."

"Accept everything that comes good-naturedly, and they will like you much better."

"Now I advise you to go home, acknowledge that you were wrong, laugh over it, shake hands and make up."

This was such good advice that Richland could but adopt it, and, returning to the school, he, after going to his room and making himself somewhat presentable, hunted up Lil Arnold and acknowledged the corn, laughing over the matter, and asking him to introduce him to Charley, which was done, and the two buried the hatchet on the spot.

Richland was allowed to sleep most of the day, and afterward joined Charley and became so intimate with him that they soon made the new boy a member of the secret society and invited him to join them in all their scrapes.

As for the revolver he presented it to Charley, who hung it in the lodge, with Richmond's consent, as a trophy, where it long remained and was used in pointing the moral of many a lecture addressed to new-comers, who were inclined to ride a little rusty and rebel against the usual initiation.

And during the long summer evenings, and all the half-holidays, the four friends—Charley, Lil, Tom and Richland, became inseparable and where one was found the others were sure not to be far off.

The swimming days had come and the boys passed much of their time on the banks of the Kokosing and in bathing, after getting up early and going to the creek before breakfast.

They were most of them expert swimmers and there was no restriction placed on them, provided that some of the larger boys were along to look after their younger companions and rescue them in case of accident.

One afternoon Charley and Richland were walking along the bank near their usual bathing place, when the latter proposed a swim and the proposition was eagerly seized by the former, for it was getting on toward summer, and the weather was intensely warm.

The other boys could be heard in the distance as they came trooping down the hill, and Charley and Richland hurried through their disrobing as rapidly as possible so as to beat the others in.

Charley was first ready, and stepping back he ran a short distance, intending to dive into the water below, off the high bank, which was some fifteen feet above the water's edge, when, just as he was about to spring from the brink, his foot slipped, wrenching his ankle terribly, causing him to utter a cry of pain, and he fell to the water below, striking on his side and knocking the breath from his body, and then sunk and did not reappear.

Half-dressed as he was Richland did not hesitate an instant but leaped in after his friend, dove far down to the bottom and, by marvelous good fortune, grasped Charley's arm, hauled him to the surface, and paddled with him to a shallow not far below, whence he carried him to the shore.

The other boys had arrived and, as they clustered around, Charley opened his eyes and, with a faint smile, said:

"'Rich,' old boy, I didn't know you could swim."

"Neither did I, Charley, until just now."

And as he spoke Charley again closed his eyes and fainted.

CHAPTER XV.

GETTING EVEN.

CHARLEY was carried home, for, even when restored to consciousness, he was unable to walk, so badly was his ankle sprained and his knee-joint twisted, and was compelled to go to bed and lie perfectly quiet, with bandages around his leg to reduce the swelling and allay the feverish condition of the joints.

Richland came to see him as soon as he was comfortably fixed, and was shaken warmly by the hand, while Charley said:

"'Rich,' I believe I would have been a goner if it had not been for you. My leg hurt me so much that I could not swim a stroke, and was as completely paralyzed as if taken with cramps; but you never swam a stroke before."

"I know it; but when I saw you fall, and realized that you had hurt yourself, I did not think of that but jumped right in."

"As soon as I got you out I began to be frightened, but while I was in the water I was too busy to think about anything."

"Well, you saved my life, and are a plucky chap. Not many fellows would dive into fifteen or twenty feet of water without being able to keep themselves afloat. I'll get even with you some time, see if I don't."

"Pshaw! Charley, any one would have done the same thing."

"No, they wouldn't; you can't convince me of that. But clear out, now; I want to go to sleep."

"All right. I'm going to my room to experiment with the fire-balls I'm making for the Fourth of July."

"Be careful you don't burn yourself."

"Oh, there's no danger. Good-by."

"Good-by. Come in and see me soon."

"I will."

And Richland left the room, while Charley, turning over on his side, soon fell fast asleep, being utterly worn out and exhausted.

There was nobody on the same floor with the two boys, their companions being out-of-doors playing ball and amusing themselves with other sports, and enjoying their half-holiday, being careful to keep away from the side of the house where Charley was that they might not disturb him with their calls and shouts.

It was a drowsy, peaceful day, and Charley slept on undisturbed for some time, quietly and peacefully, until at length the fever returned with renewed violence, and he had a dream.

A dream in which he was again standing on the bank of the Kokosing, but powerless to move, and all the current before him was a mass of seething flame, which boiled and bubbled, sending its scorching tongues of fire high in the air, while in the lava-like mass a half a dozen figures were splashing and shouting like boys in swimming.

And suddenly a figure, which he recognized as Richland, came bounding over the turf and sprung far out in the air, landing, feet first, in the blazing mass and sinking in it as far as his throat, while a mass of sparks and drops of burning fluid splashed high in the air and fell in a burning shower all around him.

And as Richland's feet touched the flaming flood he uttered a yell that curdled the blood of

the listener and chilled the marrow in his bones, and he stood there, scorching and searing; while the serpent-like flames danced and tossed around and about the unfortunate youth, who kept calling aloud in his agony.

And the shrieks kept growing louder and louder, until they awakened Charley who sat bolt upright in bed and gazed with horror-stricken features at Richland, who just then burst into the room through the open door, a mass of flame from head to foot, crying, or rather shrieking:

"Save me, Charley, oh, save me!"

Forgetful of his injured leg and regardless of the pain the movement caused him, Charley leaped out on to the floor and glanced around him like a flash for something in which to wrap his friend and smother the flames; but there was nothing in sight, the bedclothing being of the lightest order, owing to the heat and too flimsy to be of any use.

But close to him stood the large water-can, which had just been filled and seizing this Charley dashed it full on Richland and so great was the mass of water that it smothered and extinguished the flames instantly, and, except a few scorches on his hands and face and singed eyebrows and hair Richland was unharmed except about the knees and lower portions of his legs where he was somewhat badly burned.

Charley's calls for help soon brought assistance, and his friend was helped to his room, undressed, put to bed and his burns dressed, when Charley hobbled in to see him and learn the cause of the accident which had so nearly proven fatal.

Richland had been making fire-balls, and, having finished one, dipped it into the naptha which was contained in a large tin-can, standing on the window-sill, had lighted it, holding the ball by a wire, when a drop of the fluid fell into the can and ignited the liquid it contained.

He tried to blow it out, but not succeeding, had taken his cap and endeavored to fan out the flame, when the visor hit the edge of the can, upset it and spilled the burning fluid all over the lower part of his body and legs, and, frightened as he was, and unable to help himself, he had rushed into Charley's room and there been saved by the boy's presence of mind.

He was profuse in his thanks; but Charley, shaking his hand, left the room, saying quietly:

"I told you I'd have a chance to get even, Rich, old fellow, but I did not think the time would come so soon as it has."

CHAPTER XVI.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

THE convalescence of the two boys lasted about the same length of time, for Charley's ankle regained its strength but slowly, while Richland's numerous burns troubled him for some time; but as vacation approached they both recovered and were able to attend the last days of school.

Finally the hour for breaking up arrived and the boys separated, going to their different homes in high glee, while Lil, Charley, Tom and Richland took up their journey to Lil's home,

they having been invited to pass some weeks of the summer with him, and having, at the permission of their parents, accepted.

The home of the Arnolds was situated in the far Northwest, on one of the numerous lakes which abound in the State of Minnesota, and there they anticipated huge sport, as their host promised them abundance of fishing, shooting and sailing, while Charley looked forward with keen delight to the long summer days and evenings he would pass in company with the fair Lulu.

A railroad journey of some length carried them to the town where they were to take the stage, and in this they rode for something over twenty-four hours, when they again changed their means of locomotion and were soon seated in a carriage belonging to Mr. Arthur, which had been sent to meet them, and traveled smoothly over the thirty miles that lay between them and their destination, while their trunks and guns followed more leisurely in a wagon after them.

And finally, shortly after noon, they arrived at their destination, and as they swept around the broad circular road which led to the house, they burst into a cry of admiration at the fair scene which lay spread before them.

For the house was built on the brow of a hill, and from it a magnificent lawn sloped gently down to the shores of a small lake which stretched far into the distance and added to the beauty of the scene.

The house itself was a magnificent one, and its wide-open door betokened the hospitality which awaited them within, while, gathered on the steps was the Arnold family, consisting of mother, father and daughter, who welcomed the boys warmly, the heartiest reception being tendered to Charley who was regarded as a hero by them all.

But there was a fourth member of the party, whom Charley instantly regarded with feelings of dislike, and who, being introduced as Mr. Wallace, greeted the boys with a patronizing air which disgusted them.

The dust of their several days' journey being removed, the boys again joined the family on the lawn, and questions and answers flew thick as hailstones, being on subjects with which Mr. Wallace was unacquainted for the most part and leaving him out in the cold, although he did his utmost to monopolize Lulu and her conversation, while she seemed to regard him with mingled feelings of distrust and fear.

The afternoon passed away pleasantly enough, and, after an early tea on the lawn, horses were saddled and brought out, when Lulu, Wallace, Charley and Lil, started for a ride.

They rode along the bank of the lake for some distance and then turned off into the woods, where the road was much narrower, and only permitted of their riding two abreast; but Charley by a little maneuvering, managed to out-general Wallace, and rode alongside Lulu, some little distance ahead of the other two, who were not so well mounted.

Almost without being aware of it, they increased the speed of their horses until, from a rapid trot they fell into a sweeping gallop and hurried along rapidly under the boughs of the

trees which lined the road until they were far ahead of their companions.

They turned off into a still narrower path, over which the branches hung dangerously low, and Charley had just begun to speak to Lulu, to warn her to moderate the speed of her horse, when a frightened rabbit scurried across the road just in front of them, and startled the spirited animal so that he took the bit between his teeth and bounded away as rapidly as the arrow speeds from the bow, leaving Charley far behind.

But he urged his horse on and followed rapidly after, when suddenly they burst out of the woods onto the shore of the lake, but at a place where the ground was broken and covered with huge boulders, and where a fall meant almost certain death.

In vain the girl's frail strength was used in the attempt to restrain the maddened brute—he plunged on and on, until finally, as they came to the most rocky and dangerous part of the path, she felt the saddle turning beneath her, and closed her eyes with a sickening expectation of a crushing fall, which, if it did not kill her, would mar her beauty and maim her perhaps for life.

But as she slid to one side, a strong young arm was passed around her waist, she was lifted free from her flying horse, and, as a strong pull on the reins brought Charley's steed to his haunches, she was set down on the ground safe and unhurt.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SURPRISED SECRET.

CHARLEY, leaving Lulu for a few moments, started on in pursuit of the runaway horse, and soon came up with him, grazing quietly some distance off, and looking as unconcerned as possible.

The horse was led back and the saddle transferred to Charley's mount, as he would not agree that the girl should undergo the risk of a second runaway, and they rode slowly home, through the gathering twilight, without interchanging a word, until, as they neared the house, Lulu, with her eyes shining softly on him, murmured:

"Twice you have saved my life; how can I ever repay you?"

"I will tell you some time—if you will allow me."

"We will see when the time comes—and—" but suddenly a thought seemed to strike her, her face changed as though death had set the features into rigidity, and shivering as with cold, she said abruptly:

"It is growing late—let us hurry home."

They found Lil and Wallace already returned, the latter in a not very pleasant humor at having been so summarily disposed of: but in a few words, which seemed cold and heartless to Charley, Lulu explained the matter, closing by remarking that she was under renewed obligations to Mr. Skylark, and hoped that her father would thank him for her, as she was tired and was going to her room for the evening.

Charley immediately fell into the dumps, and a feeling of coldness seemed to settle down on

the little party, which resulted in their soon breaking up and retiring to their respective rooms, not before, however, Wallace, had whispered a word to Mr. Arnold, which the latter responded to by a nod and a frown, as he bid the others good-night.

Charley's room was on the second floor, and the windows opened out on a small balcony, where chairs were placed in fine weather, and from which the view over the lake and far away was lovely beyond description, and this room he had all to himself.

It was too early to think of going to bed, particularly so as he felt nervous and dispirited, on account of Lulu's actions. He could not comprehend this sudden change and determined to solve the problem before he was a day older.

The windows of his room were wide open, and, stepping out on the balcony, he seated himself, and, tilting his chair back against the wall, began to think of what could so have changed the young girl's demeanor toward him.

But suddenly his meditations were interrupted by the sound of footsteps on the porch below and he realized from the odor of tobacco that rose on the air, that it was Wallace who had come out of the house, he being the only one of the party who was in the habit of smoking.

And presently a voice broke the stillness, and he recognized the tones of Mr. Arnold.

"Well, what is it?" he asked abruptly, and Charley not wishing to play the eavesdropper, was about to steal into his room, when the answer returned by Wallace, glued him to his seat.

"I want to marry your daughter in three months' time!"

"But you said three years, when we first arranged the matter," groaned rather than said the elder man, his husky voice betraying his emotion.

"What I said then matters little—what I say now is final."

"But consider the child's age."

"I have considered. She is a woman now, and has all of a woman's gifts; besides—"

"Well?" as the other hesitated.

"She is becoming too much interested in this young cub who poses as the hero before you and her."

Charley's blood boiled at this insult, but by an effort he restrained himself, realizing that he could now learn what so deeply interested him.

"And he is a hero!" broke in the other, vehemently, as Wallace was about to continue.

"But for him Lulu would now be lying in her grave, or maimed and bleeding in her bed."

"Well, have it so, if you insist; but that has nothing to do with the matter in hand."

"Then you insist?"

"I do."

"And if I refuse my consent?"

"Walter Arnold shall be in jail within twenty-four hours, if a telegram can reach New York within that space of time."

"You are utterly without pity, then. What sum of money—"

"Do not mention money to me!"

"It is the girl I want, and the girl shall be my wife, or your son and her brother shall fill a felon's cell at Sing Sing!"

"Oh! not that—not that!" entreated the father as he broke down completely, and fairly sobbed aloud in his anguish.

"I cannot wreck my darling's young life in that way; for she now knows nothing of what he has done.

"I told her that it was a question of honor that forced her to become your wife, and rather than see me suffer ignominy and shame, she consented—although she hates you!"

"She will soon get over that. And now, good-night.

"Think over what I have said, and let me know your answer to-morrow. I think it will be a favorable one."

And the two separated, leaving Charley sitting there as one in a dream.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

BUT little sleep visited Charley's eyelids all through that night, and at the first break of dawn he arose and dressed himself, and went out into the cool, morning air to try and stop the throbbing at his temples, which was unbearable.

He had not been long on the lawn when he encountered Mr. Arnold and was thunderstruck at his appearance, so much had he aged during the night which had just passed.

Charley instantly spoke to him and related what he had overheard the evening before, excusing himself for having listened by the plea that he had been much surprised at the evidences of some unknown villainy on the part of Wallace, and that he had hoped that he himself might be of some service.

What the result of their interview was will be seen later on, but that it was satisfactory to Mr. Arnold could be judged by his increased cheerfulness as he sat at the table, surrounded by his family and their guests.

Charley, immediately after breakfast, sat down and wrote a long letter to his father which he showed to Mr. Arnold and he approving of it, a messenger was dispatched to mail it at once, when the household resumed its usual serenity, except that Lulu appeared anxious to avoid both Charley and Wallace.

But at length the boy, noticing that the wind was ruffling the waters of the lake, turned to the girl, just as she had made some remark about being fond of sailing, and invited her to go out upon the water with him in a small sloop which lay, quietly rocking, at the pier built out from the lawn and she, without being discourteous, could not well decline, while, much to Charley's delight, the other boys refused to go, having some other scheme on hand, while Mr. Arnold, as if furthering Charley's plans, requested Wallace to accompany him to the library, as he had something important to say to him, so that Charley and Miss Arnold were left alone, and, being soon seated in the little craft, and the sails being hoisted, they glided swiftly out on the lake, and the breeze freshening, were soon out of sight behind a

neighboring point of land which hid them from the house.

As they skimmed rapidly along Charley, holding the tiller tightly, turned to the young girl who sat, gazing far into the distance with a mournful expression of her lovely face and in a tone which he endeavored to make as sympathetic as possible, said:

"Miss Arnold, I have surprised your secret and am determined, if it be possible, to save you from the fate you dread."

Instantly she blazed up:

"Mr. Skylark," she cried, "how do you dare to thrust yourself into our family affairs? I—"

"Pardon me, Miss Lulu," returned Charley, gently, yet firmly; "this is only the result of a conversation held with your father, this morning.

"He knows what I have learned and approves of my telling you."

"Oh, it is you who should pardon me! Forgive my wild words if you can, and remember what I have endured and what now threatens me."

"I know only too well, and respect and pity you deeply—yet dark 'as the prospect seems I will save you and you may look forward to brighter days."

"And you know all?"

"More, probably, than you yourself."

"And you can help my father and save his honor and reputation?—for he told me that they were at stake and that by this sacrifice alone I could rescue him from the power of this man; you can readily understand how I despise and abhor him!"

"Rest assured that brighter hours are approaching and that I will lift this burden from your father's shoulders—this weight from your heart.

"And if I do, may I—mind I do not wish to bind you to anything, nor would I make your consent a condition of my actions—may I hope to win your gratitude—your regard?"

"Mr. Skylark—"

"I know that I am rash and have no right to speak thus after our short acquaintance; yet I do not know that I will have another opportunity of speaking to you again—alone."

"You know," returned the blushing girl, "that you have won my gratitude—the rest depends on yourself. If, in what you are about to undertake, the recollection of one word will nerve you to greater things and brighten your future, I will utter it—the word is—Hope!"

"Oh! Miss Lulu—"

"Not a word more on that subject, I beg of you; let matters remain as they have been between us that Mr. Wallace may suspect nothing.

"Do you go away soon?"

"Just as soon as I can receive a letter or telegram from home to account for my hurried departure."

"May God speed you and grant you a swift return!"

"Amen."

And turning the boat's prow toward the pier Charley soon brought the craft alongside the dock, when they disembarked in silence, and in

silence walked up to the house, where they separated after one long look into each other's eyes which spoke volumes to the readers.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MAN OVERBOARD.

HERTFORD WALLACE sat in an easy, lounging position on the deck of his schooner yacht, the Zephyr, a short time after the scenes related in the last few chapters, and lazily puffed out a cloud of smoke from his lips as he called to a tall slim-built, youth who was coiling a rope near by:

"Say, my lad, yours is a new face on board; when did you ship?"

"Only just before sailing, your honor," replied the lad, with a strong accent, which, combined with his olive complexion and coal-black hair, betokened his southern origin.

"So; and where do you hail from?"

"Cuba, sir."

"*Se habla Español?*"

"*Si, signor.*"

"Well, I don't; my knowledge of Spanish is confined to the phrase I just used."

"But you seem a handy sort of a lad—can you wait on table?"

"I have always been cabin-boy, sir, and never served before the mast before."

"Well, tell the master I promote you to the cabin."

"Tumble down below and put things to rights; you will find them in a pretty state of confusion, I dare say, after last night's experience."

"We tumbled about pretty lively for a time!"

"Very well, sir. Any further orders?"

"No, not just now," and Wallace settled himself back in his chair for a nap as the boy disappeared.

Arrived in the cabin the boy set to work straightening things up, and so deftly did he go about his work and so rapidly did he perform it, that the cabin was soon as neat as a lady's parlor, and presented no traces of the late storm.

He was just completing the finishing touches when Wallace appeared.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with a look of satisfaction, "you are a treasure, my lad, and if you continue to suit me, I will make it worth your while to remain in my service."

"Be on hand at dinner-time, and until then do as you please; I have nothing to occupy you with," and Wallace reascended to the deck and began to pace up and down, while the lad, going forward, seated himself, and rolling a cigarette, soon puffed away intently as if unconscious of his surroundings.

The sea had become smoothed as by magic and the light breeze scarce filled the white sails of the yacht as she slipped over the water, while overhead the sun shone brightly in the blue sky, while far and near shone the white sails of different crafts, bound in various directions.

Wallace had a naval-glass in his hand and was looking in this direction and in that, when his attention was attracted by a long trail of smoke which streamed after a steam yacht which was holding a course that, if continued,

would bring it close to the Zephyr, and in order to obtain a better view of her, he stepped up on a chair and balancing himself, as the yacht rocked gently, fixed his glass on the approaching steamer and gazed long and earnestly at it, endeavoring to recognize her.

And as he looked a slight puff of wind came rippling over the waters and before any one could call out to warn him the breeze caught the mainsail and the heavy boom swinging rapidly over, struck him severely on the head and knocked him overboard, insensible and unable to aid himself.

But as he struck the water with a loud splash, a body left the forward deck like a flash and plunged into the sea almost simultaneously with his fall and the young fellow, with whom he had shortly before been conversing, almost instantly rose to the surface, supporting Wallace, and struck out with lusty strokes in the wake of receding yacht.

She had but little headway on her, as the puff of wind which had caused the accident died away almost instantly, and it was not long before the boy was alongside and the two were lifted up on deck by a half-dozen willing hands, when Wallace was carried to his stateroom and placed on his lounge where he quickly recovered consciousness and was informed of the cause of his mishap and of the daring of the boy who had saved him.

"Send him to me as soon as he has changed his clothes," was his first order, and in obedience to it the boy in a few minutes appeared in the cabin, just as the owner of the Zephyr emerged from his room, dressed in dry garments.

"Your name?"

"Carlos, sir."

"Well Carlos, my lad, you have saved my life, and you will find that I am not ungrateful."

"You have proved yourself both daring and skillful, while your quickness to conceive and act, added to the other qualities I have mentioned make you doubly valuable as an assistant."

"I have long wished to find some one upon whom I could rely, and who would combine fidelity with courage, and that person I believe I have found in you."

Carlos simply bowed and did not otherwise reply to the compliment.

"I have an errand of some danger to perform, this night, and wish you to accompany me; are you furnished with any weapon?"

Carlos threw back his jacket and touched the handle of a small dagger concealed in his bosom.

"Good! Silent, swift and sure."

"Be ready on board to-night, whenever I may want you; and, mind, not a word!"

"I will be careful, sir," and, after learning that Wallace had no further need of his services, he withdrew, while Wallace, throwing himself on a lounge in the cabin, was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XX.

TRAPPED.

ON the night in question the rain was falling in torrents, for the intense blue of the sky had given way during the evening to a deep blackness, and the storm-king was in his glory.

As the driving drops beat in their faces and

the howling blast fairly made them stagger with its furious gusts, two men, with their heads bent down, and their bodies closely wrapped in oil-skins, struggled down one of the narrower streets in the lower portion of New York, the one who was a little in advance evidently being familiar with the locality, while the other followed his guidance as one who does not know exactly where he is going.

The leader finally stopped, and by the flickering light of a neighboring gas-jet, examined a tall, gloomy building which towered high above him in the darkness, and from the windows of which not a solitary glimmer of light issued.

Apparently satisfied, at length, that he had found what he had sought, he approached the steps that led down into the area, and tapped gently but continuously, on the door, with a small key, and kept up the rapping for some time without a response.

"Curses on the old fool!" he muttered, "he is probably steeped in rum and sound asleep.

"But we cannot return now—I must awaken him if I have to batter the crazy old door to the ground, and arouse the neighborhood."

And as he spoke he administered a thundering kick on the door, which was almost instantly followed by a grating as the bolts were drawn and the door thrown wide open before him.

"What do you mean by keeping us waiting so long, you ancient idiot?" growled the foremost of the two, as he shook the rain-drops from his wraps, sending a shower all over the unseen man inside; for that it was a man who had opened the door was quickly proven by a querulous voice that answered him from the darkness:

"I was trying to strike a light, your honor; but it is so infernally damp in this place that the matches would not catch," and he coughed a hollow, graveyard cough as he spoke, which seemed to suit the dismal surroundings exactly.

"Well, open up and let us in out of this torrent; it is drenching enough to wash out even such crimes as yours are, my ancient villain," and as the old man grumblingly obeyed, the speaker stepped inside, followed by his companion.

The door by which they had entered was closed after them, and they walked slowly along a narrow, damp passage which led for some distance in a straight direction before them and then turned sharply to the left, the leader, who seemed perfectly familiar with the premises, warning his companion so that he avoided hurting himself against the wall at the end of the passage.

They then entered a room where the newcomer, after fumbling for a moment with his match-safe, struck a match and lit a small lamp with a desperately smoky chimney, which scarce permitted a few struggling rays to penetrate the surrounding gloom.

A door opposite to the one by which they had entered was then opened, and through this they came to a flight of steps which led still further down, and this they descended, reaching finally a cellar where were placed a table and one or two chairs.

The walls were rotten with moisture, the atmosphere was dank and unwholesome, while

the slippery floor was an inch or two deep with water, the presence of which was accounted for by a trickling noise in one corner which denoted the vicinity of some leaking sewer, while a dozen rats skurried off into their holes at the sound of the opening door and peered from them with their bead-like eyes with a boldness which showed that they were but rarely disturbed.

At a sign from the leader, who placed the lamp on the table, his companion seated himself, while the old man busied himself in closing the door just behind him, but scarcely had he settled himself in the chair and drawn his feet up on the round to avoid the water when two sinewy hands encircled his throat and scored his neck like vultures' claws, while at the same instant the other threw himself upon the seated man and clasped him so firmly about the body that he was unable to move.

The contest was of but short duration and in a moment the stranger was firmly bound and powerless to stir a limb, when the leader spoke:

"Carlos, my friend, *alias* Charles Skylark, your little masquerade is at an end, and you may as well resume your former perfect pronunciation of the English language.

"You are beautifully trapped and your plot is at an end, for that you had one I well know, though what it was I cannot guess; it was probably against me and for this reason you preferred that I should live rather than that I should drown.

"You shall remain here, now that I have you in my power, until my marriage with Lulu, when you can come out and felicitate us.

"Good-night, and pleasant dreams!

"Old Brake here will attend to your physical needs and the rats will keep you company!"

And laughing sardonically Wallace—for it was he—left the cellar, followed by the old man, locking and bolting the door after him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TABLES TURNED.

THE light had been extinguished and Charley was left in total darkness, with no sound to disturb the tomb-like stillness which surrounded him save the trickling sound of the water as it flowed in from the neighboring sewer, and the pattering of the rats' feet as they scampered about the ledge which ran around the wall a little distance from the floor.

And little by little the boy realized that the water was rising higher and higher in the small, vault-like chamber, which was not more than six feet square, and as many more high.

He did not feel alarmed at his position, for the full force of the danger which threatened had not yet been realized by him; yet he struggled manfully to free himself from the ropes that cut his flesh, but with no avail; the hand which had tied the knots was too skillful to make any mistakes in that line, and he found that, struggle as he might, the bonds would not yield an inch.

Yet he did not despair and worked on until finally the water reached his feet as they rested on the round of the chair, and like a flash came to him the thought that he had been left there to drown, and that there was no intention on

the part of Wallace to release him or send him aid.

And he became for a moment paralyzed with horror, as he noticed that the trickling grew louder and louder, until it became a regular rush of water, showing that the fluid was washing away and enlarging the orifice through which it poured and that the stream would soon flood and fill the cellar to the roof, for the hole made by the leak was high up in the wall and yet evidently far below the level of the sewer.

And then some time passed when he ceased his struggles and the water crept up, up, up, until it covered the surface of the chair and then rose above his knees, and a light clawing and then a feeling as of something walking on his legs, told him that the rats had been driven from the ledge and were beginning to swim, and swam toward him, while a loud squeak, now and then, told of the battle for life that the creatures were waging between themselves in their struggles for security on the chairs and tables.

At length they fairly swarmed all over him and he shivered with disgust as their slimy bodies rubbed against his face and neck, while their teeth, ever and anon, met, as they were buried in his flesh.

His hands had been tied behind him and were now covered with water; but as the fluid reached his wrists he realized that the ropes grew a little slacker; so wrenching and pulling on the soaked cords he managed to stretch them a little and finally to slip his hands through the loops and free them entirely from their fastenings as the coils unwound, one after the other.

In an instant his hand was in his bosom where lay the dagger that Wallace had forgotten and with one or two quick cuts he severed the cords that held him, and, shaking off his loathsome burden amid a thousand screeches, he arose and waded toward the door which he knew to be just behind him.

He reached it with some little difficulty and began to try and force it open; but it was too firmly locked and would not yield to his efforts, so he attacked the upper portion with his dagger and soon cut a hole through the upper panel which he enlarged by prying the larger portion of it out with the leg of the chair, which he wrenched off and used as a lever.

Without much difficulty he managed to crawl through and then proceeded cautiously up the steps until he arrived at the second door, which he tried and also found was fastened, and fearing to arouse some one without, and knowing that it was about the middle of the night, he seated himself and determined to await developments.

In a few minutes he fell into a profound slumber, and slept long and undisturbed, until he was at length awakened by some one fumbling with the lock behind him, when he leaped to his feet, wide-awake on the instant and comprehending his situation perfectly, and, standing to one side, he awaited the entrance of the visitor.

The door swung slowly open, and as an old, wicked-looking rascal, shading a tallow candle with his hand, stepped through, Charley sprung upon him, seizing him by the throat, and press-

ing the keen point of the dagger against his breast:

"One word—one cry—and I sink the steel into your heart!" muttered the prisoner, as he pushed his jailer back against the wall, choking all power of utterance out of him.

The old man saw that he was in Charley's power and made but a feeble resistance, as Charley, closing the door, loosened his grasp, and viewing the ancient sinner by the light of the candle which he still held, again spoke to him:

"Where is your master?"

"The captain?"

"Yes, if you mean Wallace."

"Mr. Hertford left here hours ago."

"Oh! he is known only by his first name here."

"And now, old man, I am going to put you into the watery grave which you had prepared for me, and leave you there with the rest of the drowned rats, which are fit companions for such as you!"

"Oh, spare me, sir, spare me!" fairly shrieked the old man; but the boy was inexorable, and taking him by the collar and placing the dagger's point at the back of his neck, thrust him down the stairs toward the awful cellar below.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CONFESSION.

BUT as they neared the door, beyond which could be heard the rushing of the inflowing waters, the old man gave himself up for lost, and seeing that he had probably one chance of saving his life, or else realizing that if he must die he would not go down into his grave with an unburdened sin on his conscience, he cried out:

"Give me but five minutes and I will make a confession to you which will relieve a young man from the imputation of a crime and fix the guilt where it justly belongs!"

At the words Charley stopped as the thought struck him that this man, who was Wallace's tool and, in all probability his accomplice, could explain many things which were at present dark and unfathomable to him.

"Speak then!" he said, as he released the cringing scoundrel; "but, remember! if you endeavor to escape or tell me a lie, you shall surely be thrust into yonder cellar to drown!"

"On the other hand, if you tell me what I wish to know, yet scarce dare hope for, I will set you free, after you have testified in court."

"What I have to say concerns Walter Arnold!"

"Hah! you start! I thought from what the captain told me that you would be interested."

"What did he tell you?"

"That you were in love with the young lady whom he intends making his wife, and that it was to his interest to keep you out of sight until after his marriage has taken place."

"And what do you know of Walter Arnold?"

"This—that he is a wronged and wrongfully accused man!"

"And you can prove it?"

"You shall see:"

"A year ago I was chief book-keeper for Wallace & Co., general importers, and as one of my assistants had Walter Arnold, who had

been placed in the position he occupied by the influence of his father, who wished him to acquire a certain business knowledge before he branched out for himself.

"But one fatal day his sister came to see him, and from that moment dated his trouble; for Wallace fell violently in love with her and used every means to win her regard, but without avail, for she seemed to have an instinctive repugnance for him and her intention was not at fault, for he is worthy of no good woman's confidence or liking.

"When he found that he could not win her by fair means he bethought himself of foul; and sought my assistance, which I could not refuse as he had a hold on me, on account of a slip I had once made and which, if divulged, would send me to prison.

"So he concocted a plot which we immediately proceeded to put into execution.

"At my request, and in his own name, Walter rented an attic-room in the house where he lodged, ostensibly for the storage of his trunks and some odds and ends that lumbered his room, and gave me the key that I might use it in working on the model of a machine I was supposed to be inventing.

"And to this room I secretly carried large numbers of small but valuable articles from the importing house, until I had stored there goods amounting in value to several thousand dollars; and then, affairs being arranged and Mr. Arnold being in the city, the trap was sprung.

"It is unnecessary to repeat the story that Wallace told him; but the main points were that Walter and I had formed a partnership for stealing largely, and that, the goods being disposed of, we were to flee the country on the proceeds.

"Wallace pretended to be terribly shocked, and said he would not expose the lad, but that, if his father agreed, the matter should be kept a secret and the boy should be retained in his position, after being told by Wallace of the discovery of the robberies; and to this Mr. Arnold only too readily agreed, for his son's as well as his family's sake.

"And then I was brought out, and played my part—wept, implored, begged and cringed—claimed that I had led the boy astray, and begged that we should not be exposed as we would be ruined.

"And Wallace generously (!) agreed to keep the matter secret, and contented himself with discharging me—although my salary still goes on, and I received a handsome lump sum for the part I had played.

"And Mr. Arnold, feeling extremely grateful to Wallace for his consideration, listened to his suit with approbation, and promised that Wallace should marry the girl; but, as time rolled on and he saw how she disliked the man, he tried to break it off, when Wallace, throwing off the mask, vowed that he would have the girl or send her brother to prison, and forced the father to agree to his demands.

"And now you know the whole story."

"And this is true?" hoarsely demanded the boy.

"As true as that I now speak, and I have one letter from Wallace that will prove it."

"And you will swear to this in court?"

"Readily, for I am tired of this life of crime; and when I think that I assisted in nearly murdering you—although I did not know the water was rising so rapidly—I shudder and repent!"

"Your good deed will condone your evil ones; but come now, we will hunt up a magistrate, you shall make your statement, and when we find this plotting villain, he will be instantly arrested and your mind will be at rest.

"And let your reward be the thought of the peace that you will bring to the family of this innocent young fellow, who does not even know that he is suspected, I suppose.

"Come on," and the two, leaving the house, sought the officers of the law, and prepared their friend Mr. Wallace for a disagreeable surprise.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TRAGEDY.

THE warrant being properly made out and sworn to, Charley and Brake left to get something to eat, after which they went to the hotel where the young fellow had left his luggage, and there Charley changed his clothes and made himself presentable by removing the olive tint from his face, and thence, accompanied by our officer, they took a cab and drove to Wallace's place of business.

Leaving Brake in the vehicle, Charley entered the store, followed by the detective, who was in citizen's dress, and inquired for Mr. Wallace.

"He is in the office, sir," replied the young man whom he addressed, and whose fresh features recalled the well-remembered lineaments of Lulu Arnold, and Charley walked back, knocked and in obedience to the response, threw the door open and walked in, finding the office tenanted by but one occupant and that one Wallace.

At sight of Charley, whom he supposed safely confined in the cellar into which he had entrapped him, Wallace sprung to his feet and, white as if the visitor were an apparition from the grave, stammered:

"What do you wish?"

"I have learned, Mr. Wallace, that a robbery has been committed in your store and have requested an officer to accompany me to arrest the guilty person, who is, I believe, not far off."

And turning, he motioned to the detective, who had followed closely after, to enter.

Regaining some of his wonted coolness, Wallace addressed the new-comer:

"You are an officer?"

"I am, sir."

"One moment please—Walter!" going to the door and calling, while the officer kept a sharp look on him, for fear that he might escape.

"Yes, sir," came back the answer from the young man whom Charley had accosted on entering.

"Step here a minute, if you please."

And as the boy entered the office Wallace, pointing to him, turned to the detective and cried:

"There has been a robbery committed here, and I call upon you to arrest the principal."

"All right, sir," returned the official, and turning, as if to pass by Wallace to walk toward Walter he, before the former realized what he was about to do, slipped a pair of handcuffs on his hands deftly and quickly, so that Wallace was a prisoner in an instant.

"What means this insult!" he shrieked, mad with rage and his blood at fever-heat.

"It is safe to be cautious, sir, and you are such a slippery cove"—half-apologetically—"that a person never knows what you may be up to."

"But there stands the thief," raising his ironed hands and pointing to Walter, who blanched at this terrible accusation.

"You lie! Hertford Wallace," came in deep tones from the threshold, as Brake appeared on the scene.

"You are the thief and I am your accomplice!"

At this Wallace broke into a torrent of invective and reproach cursing his tool and defying him to produce any proof of what he said.

"You forget the note you wrote me, one night, when you were unable to meet me, and in which you direct me to place a lot of laces in the arranged place and warn me that I must be careful that the boy does not suspect."

"But you told me you had burnt that note!"

"And I lied; it was the only proof I had and I knew that, once you were through with me, you would throw me off like a dog—I was not going to part so easily with the only weapon of defense I had."

"Well, well; come along, Mr. Wallace, I can't stand here all day," interrupted the officer. Walter begged Charley to enlighten him as to what was going on for he was completely in the dark.

So Wallace, Brake and the detective entered the cab, and Walter, after giving directions as to closing the store for the present, hurried off to the room where Wallace's preliminary examination was to be held, and where Charley had to appear as a witness, he giving to Lulu's brother a full account of what had happened, while the young fellow could not restrain his anger on learning of the dastardly plot, nor feel quite contented with his father for so readily distrusting him, although he confessed that the plot was well calculated to deceive any one.

They reached the magistrate's office just in time, and Charley, being sworn, deposed as to what he knew, Brake having first given his testimony.

"What caused you to interest yourself in the movements of Mr. Wallace?" was asked of Charley, and, painful as it was, he was about to explain his feeling for the girl who was being persecuted, when a loud groan from the prisoner attracted the attention of all present, and as his face became livid, a froth issued from his lips, and Wallace fell to the floor, before those near could catch him, dead.

"He has poisoned himself!" cried a physician who happened to be present, and the clinched jaws of the dead man being forced open, they found a thin film of silver, which of a globular shape had held the deadly dose, and to the character of which a faint odor of bitter almonds attested beyond a doubt.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BACK AGAIN.

THE man had preferred death to exposure, and had died almost instantly after swallowing the poison which he had evidently always carried with him in case of exposure.

There was nothing more to detain Charley and Walter, so, after sending a telegram to Mr. Arnold that they were coming, the two—now fast friends—took the first train West, and sped on their way to the Arnolds' home.

The journey seemed almost interminable to Charley, who burned with the wish to see Lulu again and to tell her that her life was now free from the danger which had threatened her, and that she was free to choose whom she would.

When they reached the end of their stage journey, they found Mr. Arnold awaiting them with a vehicle in which to drive them home, and as Charley stepped out of the stage, emotion prevented the elder gentleman from saying a word, yet the tears shining in his eyes, and the crushing pressure he gave Charley's hand, spoke louder than all the phrases of gratitude he could have coined, and then turning to his son he folded him in his arms and whispered:

"Forgive me, Walter, for my unjust suspicions!"

And in the close embrace both felt that confidence was fully restored, and that distrust had fled from between them, forever.

And then during the drive home, Charley gave a detailed account of his adventures, and was congratulated again and again by Mr. Arnold, for the courage and coolness he had displayed, and praised until he fairly blushed with pride and pleasure.

And finally they drove up to the house where the boys were standing on the porch and, unacquainted as they were with the cause of Charley's sudden departure, welcomed his return, warmly, extending the same greeting to Walter, who promised to become a great favorite with Richland and Tom Wilson.

But one prominent figure was missing from the group, and rove as Charley's eyes would, he failed to discover Lulu's presence anywhere in the vicinity, and dreaded to ask for her, fearing lest she might be ill or away.

But at length Mr. Arnold, noticing the boy's uneasiness, and smiling pleasantly as he realized Charley's impatience, turned to Lil, and asked him where his sister was, and was told that she was in the library, awaiting their return, whereupon the father, turning to his young friend, smilingly told him to go and hunt her up, for, he said, significantly:

"I know she will want to see you and hear an account of your trip—tell her *all* about it, for she knows nothing."

And Charley, leaving them standing or sitting in some of the easy-chairs which were scattered around on the piazza, entered the hall, and, restraining his impatience as best he could, proceeded leisurely toward the library and tapped gently on the door, with his hand on the knob.

A soft voice bade him enter and flinging the door wide, he stepped into the room and stood before the young girl, who, having evidently not heard the arrival of the carriage, as the

library was situated in the rear of the house, half rose as he entered, with a slight cry of surprise, while the soft color rapidly mounted over her face until she blushed a warm red that resembled the color of a rose in June.

For a moment they stood thus, and then, Lulu, gliding forward, extended her hand with a word of welcome and kindness:

"You surprise me somewhat, Mr. Skylark, for I did not expect you for hours yet; still you are not the less welcome that you arrived unexpectedly."

"And am the bearer of good news, Miss Arnold."

"And what is it?"

"News that concerns you."

"Me!" coquetting with him, although a soft look stole from beneath her lowered lids and seemed to ask pardon for the trifling.

"News that I thought you would be relieved to learn, and which I was so anxious to tell you that the miles of my long journey hither seemed to lengthen into leagues."

"But as you appear indifferent I will not trouble you by repeating it."

"Oh, forgive me, Mr. Skylark! I know that your journey East was taken in my behalf, and I am wrong to trifle with you; won't you please tell me what has happened?"

"You are free. Mr. Wallace will never trouble you more with his attentions, and your father's honor has been restored, or, rather, it was never in any danger."

"And you have proven this?"

"I have, beyond the possibility of a doubt. I have your father's permission to tell you all—may I?"

"If you will sit here on the sofa with me, and first tell me I am forgiven for wounding your feelings, I will listen all day if you wish."

"I will not be so tedious as that," cried the boy cheerily, as he seated himself and began to relate his tale, beginning with Wallace's plot to secure her and ending with his arrest, saving her, for the present, the knowledge of his death.

And if, during the recital, when he told of his danger, the girl moved a little closer to him, and did not object when he took her hand and caressed it, who can blame her?

CHAPTER XXV.

PROPOSING AN EXPEDITION.

THEY were not interrupted for a long time, and Charley made the most of his opportunity, being urged to eloquence by sundry sympathetic "Ohs" and "Ahs!" uttered by Lulu at the more thrilling portions of his story.

And when he had finished and she realized all that he had dared and done for her, the girl threw off all semblance of coquetry and became the honest little woman she was, once more, and while the tears melted deep in her magnificent eyes, she turned to the young fellow, whom she could but admire, and said:

"You have added, a thousand-fold, to the gratitude I owe you, and anything I can do or say would be pitifully small in comparison."

"My father will thank you; I cannot."

"But can you not say something more?"

"Can you not say that I—"

"I told you, just before you left us," interrupted the dainty little creature, gently, "that you could hope. Remember that, and"—blushing furiously at her own words—"hope and expect whatever you wish; if it depends on me, you shall not be disappointed."

And eluding his outstretched hand, she touched her lips with the tip of her finger, looked at him an instant in a manner that set his heart beating, and then fled from the room before he could utter a single word, leaving him in a whirlwind of happiness and gaping at the panorama of bliss her words had unrolled before him.

He was aroused from his reverie by the shouting voice of Lil, who just then came calling through the hall to him, and pulling himself together with an effort, he joined the boys and Mr. Arnold on the porch, and was soon talking with them on various different subjects which interested them.

But at length he found an opportunity to say a word to Mr. Arnold, and stammeringly began:

"Mr. Arnold, I have only known you for a short time, yet that time has been prolific in incident, and has taught me to care more for your daughter than I dare express."

"Do you think that at some future date, when I shall have graduated, you can agree to—"

And here he stopped short, not having the courage to go any further, although the gentleman whom he was addressing encouraged him with a kindly smile.

"My boy," said the other as Charley stopped, "I have seen that this would be the result, and if I had objected, I should have stopped it long before this."

"But you are both young now, and must wait for some years before anything can be settled."

"If, when you are twenty-two, and Lulu is eighteen, you both find yourselves in the same mind, my answer will be then, as it is now: 'God bless you both, and make you happy!'"

The boy's happiness was then complete, and he could scarce express his gratitude; and the interruption caused by Lulu coming out to greet her brother Walter, was a welcome one, and in a short time the whole party was chatting and talking gayly, although two of them, at least, were decidedly embarrassed and evidently wished to be alone apart or alone together.

Finally the talk drifted around to home subjects, and Walter aroused an intense interest among the three guests by asking his father:

"Has the mystery of the frequent robberies of houses and stores in Daneville ever been solved?"

"No; the thieves, whoever they are, have invariably escaped detection, and what is more singular, nothing has ever been learned of their hiding-place, although the whole country 'round has been thoroughly searched and all suspicious characters carefully watched to see where they congregated."

"Well, it is strange—and how about the haunted house, that has terrified so many visitors?"

"A haunted house!" cried, as one, the three boys, who were listening eagerly.

"Yes; not very far away—ten or fifteen miles from here, is an old two-story log-cabin, standing midway between the towns of B—and L—, and this deserted cabin has the reputation of being haunted, from the mysterious sounds that assail the ears of every one who passes a night there.

"And a great many have endeavored to penetrate the mystery, but without success, and finally the whole country has begun to be decidedly shy of going near it after dark."

"A haunted house! What a chance, fellows," cried Charley, addressing his companions.

"What do you say if we pay the ghosts a visit and see if we can't make their acquaintance?"

"You have no objection, Mr. Arnold?"

"None in the world. No personal injury has ever resulted to any of the visitors, and I do not think there is any danger from the spooks; although I believe that the spirits are not responsible for the reputation of the house, but that, when the mystery is solved, if it ever is, it will be found that there is nothing very startling in it."

"Then we'll go to-night—hey, boys?"

A chorus of agreeing exclamations followed, amid which the soft voice of Lulu could be heard, begging them to be careful, although she encouraged Charley with a soft look, which set his heart beating wildly.

And then they separated to prepare for their expedition, and did not meet again until dinner.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

ABOUT ten o'clock that night a spring wagon, drawn by two fine roadsters, drew up in front of a large tree which stood by the roadside, and from it descended four figures, which might have been recognized as Charley, Lil, Richland and Tom, by any one who was acquainted with them, and after whispering together for a minute, plunged into the forest and disappeared, when the driver of the vehicle, turning his horses, drove off to the town of L—, a few miles away, put up his team, and then went to bed in the small and unique hotel the place boasted of.

But the boys stole quietly on through the woods and finally came to a large clearing, in the center of which, standing solitary and alone, was the house they were in search of, and which loomed, gloomy and forbidding, through the darkness.

Approaching cautiously, they saw or heard no sign of life about the house, all being dark and silent as the grave and it was with feelings of awe and something very like fear that they drew near and tried the front door, which, however refused to yield and remained firmly shut.

Relinquishing their efforts to gain entrance by that means they then turned their attention to a neighboring window, and, without much difficulty succeeded in forcing the shaky old shutter, which hung by one hinge, open, and raising the sash, which was unfastened and open

to the night air, the glass having long since disappeared.

Crawling through the window, the boys lighted a lantern with which they had provided themselves, and began to explore the room in which they were standing, but found nothing worth mentioning, the dust, lying undisturbed on the floor, proving that no human foot had trodden the boards for some time at least, and leaving this apartment they carefully explored the whole house, but found that they could learn nothing.

There seemed to be no cellar and the building contained but four rooms, two down-stairs and two above, the two floors being divided by a hall running through the building and in which was built the staircase leading to the second story.

Satisfying themselves that there was not a soul in the building and carefully nailing up the shutters and doors on the first floor, they went up-stairs and took possession of the room over the one they had first entered, the door of which was just at the head of the stairs, and here seated themselves, after closing the door, and laid their revolvers on the floor beside them, for each one of the boys was armed with one of those weapons.

Their explorations had occupied some time and it was now growing late and as Charley, drawing his watch out, looked at it by the light of the lantern, some one asked the time:

"Midnight," answered the boy, and as if the hour were about to strike, a thundering rap sounded just outside the door, and the quartette leaped to their feet as if moved by an electric shock, while they looked at each other in amazement and asked what it could be.

But Charley, grasping revolver and lantern, leaped toward the door, and, as Richland threw it wide open, dashed into the hall and looked around and down the stairs.

But all was quiet, and no trace of any moving object could be discerned, search as they would.

Again they went over the house, carefully and without missing an inch of visible space, but nothing was discovered, and they returned to their former quarters, puzzled and somewhat disconcerted, leaving the door open and seating themselves with their faces toward it.

The dim moonlight, stealing through the crevices of the shutter which closed the solitary window of the room, which had, when they first arrived, added a little to the brightness, had long since disappeared, and as they sat listening, there came a sudden peal of thunder, a flash of lightning, and almost at the same instant, the rain, which had been threatening for some time, fell in a drenching flood on the roof over their heads, while the southing wind, whistling through the room only added to the dismalness of their surroundings.

They were, each and all, terribly impressed with the fear which steals over the strongest man when face to face with the unknown, and would have given much to be safely at Lakeview, as Mr. Arnold's home was aptly named, when suddenly, without any warning whatever, there came from the hall outside a thumping and a knocking like the sound produced by a heavy barrel or keg being rolled down a flight

of steps, while the crashing of a mass of chains, mingled with unearthly groans, filled the air, heightened by a sobbing and a low wailing that seemed as if coming from the lips of tortured women.

Again they sprung up, breathless, and as they, with white faces, looked at the door, expecting every instant to see some ghostly apparition appear, one of the boys stepped forward, his foot striking the lantern and overturning it, so that it was instantly extinguished, leaving them in total darkness, while at the same moment a chorus of exulting cries came wailing to their ears, as if a dozen lost souls were exulting in their discomfiture, and welcoming them to perdition!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ROBBERS' DEN.

AND then began a night of horrors which again and again made the boys long for the coming of day; for when the lantern had toppled over, all of the oil in it had run out on the floor and they were without the slightest means of illumination, while the darkness was so thick that it could have been cut with a knife.

And all the time the noises continued, although Charley, groping his way to the door, fired six shots from his revolver right and left, but with no effect, except that of doubling the demoniac yells which arose from every direction, seemingly in derision at his action.

But the boys would not leave the house, being determined to brave it out and not caring to venture out into the storm of rain which beat against the sides and roof of the house with a fury which seemed to threaten to crush down the shaky old building, while the wind howled and moaned like a lost spirit seeking rest.

But at length the rain ceased, the wind lulled and the thunders rolled, muttering, into the distance and the first streaks of dawn came stealing through the crevices in the shutter, and before them their fears fled, as if by magic, while they laughed at the woe-begone appearance of each other.

But when they began to look for some explanations of the night's noises, they were again baffled, all being apparently as undisturbed as when they had arrived and the noises having ceased just before daybreak.

But they continued their explorations and Charley at length became convinced that, as the noises had proceeded from the direction of the staircase, leading to the second story, the solution of the mystery would be found within it, so, taking an ax that was among their traps, he smashed in the top stair, and as the edge splintered the wood and was withdrawn, he uttered a shout that gathered the boys about him, eager to learn what he had discovered, and in a few words he told them.

The staircase was double, there being a space between the two of something over four feet, and between the two stairways there was ample room for a person to crawl down and up and to lower barrels, boxes, kegs or any other kind of package or parcel, as he quickly demonstrated by cutting the top stair away, completely, and laying the opening bare to view.

He also found that almost the same space had

been left between the floor of the upper and the ceiling of the lower hall, and revolver in hand, he crawled into this place and continued his explorations until he reached the end of the house, where he found that a large chimney, with a ladder nailed to the side, and fitted with a rope and pulley, led to the story below.

Followed by the boys, he clambered down the ladder until he reached the bottom, which he found to be below the first floor, while a passage led off into the distance which he did not dare explore, being unprovided with any light; so returning to the top floor, he requested Lil to set off after another lantern, while he and the boys remained on the lookout and listened for any sound that might warrant the belief that any of their nocturnal visitors were in the vicinity.

But no sound disturbed the quiet, until finally, after a very short absence, Lil returned, having met the driver who was coming to meet them, he having a lantern in his wagon, which would answer all the desired purpose.

Leaving Ben in charge of the team, Lil entered and lighted his lantern, handing it to Charley, who seemed to be accepted as the leader, when he, crawling again through the aperture he had made, descended the false staircase, followed by his friends.

Slowly and laboriously they crawled down until they came to the bottom, and there Charley holding his light high in the air, illuminated the cellar in which they stood, and they looked around amid exclamations of wonder and surprise.

For the large room in which they stood, and which covered almost the entire space beneath the house, was packed with every conceivable sort of package and bale, not strewn about in confusion, but carefully stored, as if space had been of more importance than the time occupied in providing for it by careful storage.

And at the other end of the cellar yawned an opening about four feet wide and six feet high, which evidently gave entrance to a passage that extended into the earth for some distance, as the end could not be seen.

At the foot of the staircase lay a large barrel with a pulley fastened to it, and which, on being rolled over, gave out a clanking sound as if filled, or, at least, partially so, with chains and pieces of iron, and this, being pulled up the steps and allowed to roll down again, had evidently been used to produce the sounds which they had heard during the long vigil of the night.

The house was evidently the rendezvous of the band of robbers, which had so long devastated the surrounding country, and they had resorted to the means described to cause visitors to think that it was haunted, and keep the people away.

There was no sign of the presence of any one and they had evidently left the premises, being in the habit of occupying them at night and seeking other quarters by day.

But where were these other quarters?

This question Charley resolved to answer, and calling on his friends to follow him, he, taking the lead, with lantern and pistol, plunged into the unknown passage opposite and strode boldly forward.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SEEKING THE EXIT.

THEY proceeded in silence, and cautiously, for some distance, without any fresh discovery, when suddenly the passage ceased, and there was nothing in front of them but a blank wall of earth that barred their further progress, and of necessity they stopped and, for a moment, were completely nonplused.

A slight murmuring, as of water running, sounded overhead, and the walls and roof of the passage were dank and wet, while the moisture trickled down in large drops and sunk into the ground below.

The sides and top were of large stones and there seemed to be no possible solution of the problem which confronted them, so the boys, after sounding the sides and roof carefully, to see if any hollowness might betray the presence of an opening beyond, but without success, returned to the house to consult.

Arrived in the cellar, the boys seated themselves in various postures, more comfortable than elegant, when Charley, turning to Lil, inquired:

"This house faces east, does it not?"

"Due east."

"Then the passage which we have just followed has a westerly direction?"

"Precisely, as west is opposite east."

"Any house in that direction?"

"Nothing nearer than a couple of miles."

"Humph! Then that passage cannot lead to any dwelling where our friends the ghosts could live."

"Hardly, as the passage is not two miles long."

"Nor anywhere near it."

"By George! I wonder how long it is, by the way."

"We can easily find out; there's lots of rope lying about this place."

And there was. Coils upon coils of clothes-line, evidently stolen from some neighboring store, lay heaped in one corner, and taking one of these, Charley, stationing Richland at the entrance of the passage, took the other end of the rope in his hand, and, uncoiling it as he went, walked on until his outstretched hand encountered the wall at the other end of the passage, when, placing the rope against the slimy stones, he cut it off at the point of contact, holding on to the end which gave him the exact length of the passage, and then rejoined his companions.

"Now, boys," said he, "we will get outside, and then, measuring from the wall of the house, due west, the length of this rope, we will find ourselves somewhere in the near vicinity of the unknown entrance to this mysterious passage."

"Come on!"

And followed by the boys, who, for the first time, began to understand his idea, he ascended the steps as rapidly as he could, followed by his friends, who began to glow with excitement as they realized that they were to witness some new developments which would probably lead to something definite in the way of locating the thieves.

They scrambled out of the window and then went to the back of the house, and locating themselves by the chimney, fastened one end of

the rope firmly to the wall, as none of the boys were willing to remain behind and hold it, being too curious to see what the measurement would disclose, and then, going as nearly in a straight line as they could they walked on until they had nearly reached the end of the rope, when an exclamation of dismay broke from them all, as they suddenly stopped.

For just in front of them, bubbling and gushing along, was a noisy little stream that ran, bank full, just over the spot where the entrance to the passage should be, and, try as they would, they could locate it nowhere else.

The end of the cord showed that, if their measurements were exact, the end of the passage lay underneath the center of the stream, and yet it seemed as if that could not be, for of what use could the passage be under those circumstances?

While they were arguing this question and endeavoring to arrive at some satisfactory conclusion, Charley was prowling about, wandering up and down the stream, when, a little above where they were standing and around a point made by a bend in the creek, he found a pile of brush which stretched across the stream and seemed, at first sight to have drifted down from above and become lodged by accident, yet as he looked, he became convinced that the branches had been placed there by design, and investigating the matter more closely found that they hid a well constructed dam that stretched completely across the stream, and which was furnished with a long gate, that was now raised, and through which the water poured furiously.

Searching still further, he found the lever which lowered and raised the gate, so returning to his companions, he cried:

"Boys, the entrance we are looking for is at the bottom of that stream, or I'm a Dutchman; just you wait and see."

And while the others rather inclined to laugh at him, he went around to the dam and lowered the gate.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN INTRUDER.

THE gate slid tightly down into its place and instantly the flow of water ceased, and Charley, rejoining his companions, watched the creek as the water, no longer fed from above began to grow lower and lower, until, finally, the stones began to show, little by little above the surface and by degrees the water ran off, leaving the bed of the creek entirely bare.

And there, situated about the middle of the stream, was a large, flat stone, with an iron ring set in the center of it, and which was evidently the clew that they were in search of.

It was secured in its place by an iron bar which crossed it, the ends of which were held by staples sunk into two large stones which formed part of the bed of the creek, so that it could not be raised from below, and let the water in, and the edges of the stone, when Charley had raised it up, were found to be of rubber, which fitted against similar material, the weight of the stone pressing the elastic substance and making a joint which was nearly, if not quite, water-tight.

Above the dam a channel, leading to a ravine near by, carried off the water, after it reached a certain height, so that it would not overflow the dam itself and thus flood the bed of the creek below, and pre-

vent those within the passage from coming out without admitting the water.

The whole plan was an ingenious one to prevent discovery and the boys could but admire the genius which had conceived it.

The visits of the band were evidently made at night, so there was nothing to prevent the boys from examining the entire arrangement at their leisure, so they did not hurry themselves, but at length, feeling that it was time to breakfast, they replaced the stone cover, fastened it down with the bar, and then, opening the gate of the dam, they allowed the water to take its normal course and things soon resumed the appearance of not having been interfered with, when they returned to the cabin, taking the rope with them, rejoined the driver and, entering the wagon, were driven to L—, where they were soon engaged in discussing an excellent breakfast, but said nothing concerning their adventures to any one.

After disposing of, and settling for, the meal, they returned to Lakeview and there related to Mr. Arnold the adventures of the night and requested permission to return and capture the band, if they could do so without much danger, claiming that, as the honor of the discovery was theirs, so, also, should be the capture.

But to this he demurred strongly, being seconded in his opposition by Lulu, who begged the boys not to encounter any further risks, but to inform the sheriff and allow him to undertake the dangerous mission; for, she argued, the thieves would be sure to show fight and some of the boys be injured, in the fray that must certainly result.

But youthful eloquence carried the day, and as the boys promised to be careful, and Charley assured Mr. Arnold that, if they carried out the plan he had conceived, no danger could result, a reluctant consent was at length given and the boys, providing themselves with various tools, and reinforced by the company of Walter, set out on their return, but not until Charley had exchanged a few words with Lulu, who stamped her tiny foot in vexation, and declared that he was "real mean" to thus expose her brothers to danger, and that she hated him, desperately.

But as the dreadful word was softened by a most bewitching smile, he was not so much hurt as might be imagined, and started off with his heart beating high with courage and hope.

Arrived at the house, the wagon was again dismissed and the boys, with the aid of sundry planks they had brought, and using saw and hammer as if they were master-carpenters, proceeded to build a bulkhead across the end of the passage, where it entered the cellars, and did their work so well and so rapidly, that, by sundown, the place was securely closed and any one, trying to break through, would have abandoned the task as hopeless.

Richland had been left up-stairs to give warning if any one approached, and, shortly after the sound of hammering had ceased, as he looked from the window of the room where they had passed the night, he saw a figure steal out from the shadows of the wood and, with revolver in hand, cautiously approach the house, finally reaching the window below and putting his head inside to listen.

Richland argued to himself that the visitor must be a spy, sent to investigate their doings, for if he were on any honest errand he would not have approached so cautiously, nor would he have been armed and prepared to defend himself.

Making up his mind quickly and realizing that no great harm would be done, even were he mistaken, he determined to capture the new-comer without undertaking to warn his friends, as that would take valuable time and do more harm probably than good, so silently and swiftly he climbed to the sill of the window, and the shutter being open, swung out and dropped straight down, feet first, on the back of the man below, knocking him to the ground, and the breath out of him and taking him

so completely by surprise that the boy had him tied before he could make a move to defend himself.

And then calling the boys, he told them what had happened and they, standing around, began to question their prisoner as to his intentions in thus stealing upon them.

CHAPTER XXX.

CAPTURED.

"WHAT does this yere mean?" gruffly demanded the man, as he scowlingly surveyed the little group around him.

"Can't a peaceable citizen of this yere country take a walk 'ithout being knocked down and half-killed?"

"You look very much like an honest citizen," said Charley. "What were you doing sneaking up on us that way?"

"I warn't sneakin'! I had heerd o' the ha'nted house, and war a-goin' to pay ther ghosts a visit."

"Yes," very likely.

"It's my opinion you are one of the gang which quarters here and I'm going to keep you close until to-morrow, anyhow."

"Look here, young fellow—"

"Oh! shut up; bundle him along, boys; we'll put him in the collar for safe-keeping."

The captured man having been safely disposed of, the boys then left the cabin as darkness came on, and proceeded to the vicinity of the dam, first taking care to close the shutters of the house, so that no wandering traveler would notice anything unusual in its appearance.

Arriving at the creek, the boys, taking various directions, climbed different large trees that stood about, and there made themselves as comfortable as possible, while they prepared for their long vigil, each one being armed with a rifle, besides the revolvers they carried.

They were arranged on both sides of the creek and in such a manner that they controlled completely the point where the trap-door was situated, and any one on the ground below was wholly at their mercy.

And then they waited, until darkness came down, and rendered the obscurity complete so that they could scarcely distinguish any objects only a few feet distant, until the moon rose and, shining down through the branches of the trees, lighted up the scene with a noon-time brightness.

And suddenly, some distance off they heard the approach of a vehicle, which gradually drew nearer until it stopped in the forest a short distance off, when voices were heard and a small group of men, walking boldly forward, as though long immunity had rendered them careless, came straggling through the trees until six stalwart figures stood, fully revealed in the moonlight, on the banks of the stream.

One of them left his companions and, walking up a little distance, worked the lever closing the gate, and gradually the water subsided, until, as he rejoined his comrades, the stone closing the entrance was laid bare.

The bar was removed and then, the stone being lifted from its place, one of the men, who seemed to be the leader, spoke to the others in a gruff voice, saying:

"The horses will stand: we'll go and make room for our load, for we've got a good haul to-night, boys; but I wonder what keeps Corton."

"Probably got drunk at L—" returned one of the others, carelessly.

"Very likely: he has a weakness for doing that whenever he gets a chance. But come on."

Swinging down the opening the band disappeared, one at a time, until the place was deserted; but scarcely had the last one of the gang dropped out of sight when an exclamation and an oath, coming from the depths of the passage gave warning that the leader had found his further progress interrupted by the bulwark that the boys had erected, and a

moment after a head appeared at the opening, as the thieves rushed back; but the man who was about to climb out, suddenly stopped as Charley's voice rung out:

"Stop!"

"The first man who tries to come out, until told to do so, will be shot down!"

And at the last word five rifle-shots rung out on the night air, as the boys, one after the other, as agreed beforehand, discharged their repeating rifles, while the man, frightened into instant submission, dropped back into the passage.

And again the boy's voice rung out:

"Give yourselves up, or we turn on the water and drown you like rats in a hole!"

For a moment no response came, as the gang seemed to be consulting together among themselves, but at length the sullen answer came:

"We surrender."

"Then come out, as ordered, one at a time, and, boys, if two heads appear together, shoot them down!"

"All right, Charley," and the rifles clicked ominously as the boys prepared themselves.

Charley and Walter dropped to the ground and stationed themselves near the entrance, seizing and tying the thieves, one by one, as they clambered up in obedience to the summons, "Next!" until the whole of the band was firmly secured, when they were marched off at rifle muzzle, the wagon, filled with goods, being driven by a roundabout road, until they reached the cabin, when the other prisoner was brought out.

"Hullo, Corton, that you?" exclaimed one of the gang, thus inadvertently betraying his companion.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN ACCIDENT.

THE boys kept their prisoners closely guarded all through the night, sending Lil in the wagon, to inform Mr. Arnold of their safety and of the successful termination of their adventure, and requesting him to be on hand the next morning with the sheriff.

So, early the next day the prisoners were turned over to the authorities and the boys, glad to be able to get some rest, returned to Lakeview and retiring, made up for the sleep that they had lost, reappearing in the evening feeling as fresh as larks.

The next day the boys were compelled to appear before the grand jury, which happened to be in session at that time, and there gave their testimony which resulted in the whole band being indicted, while the District Attorney complimented the boys most highly for their courage and strategy, and the numerous merchants who had recovered large quantities of their goods, thanked Charley and his friends again and again, and even talked of getting up a testimonial of some sort.

But to this the boys objected most seriously and so the matter terminated, although for a long time the country round rung with the story of their adventures, while crowds of people flocked to see the haunted house.

So long-continued and wide-spread had been their depredations that the judge of the district decided to hold a special term and try the thieves at once, particularly as the boys would be returning to college soon, and the State would require their evidence, so, the following week the court-room was crowded with spectators as the trial of the band was begun.

The evidence was so clear and overwhelming that there was scarcely any defense, and the different members of the gang were sent to the penitentiary for various terms, the shortest of which seemed almost a lifetime to the boys.

And then the curtain went down on this act in the boys' career forever, for from that day until this they have never heard a thing concerning the gang of thieves [they sent to their prison cells to expiate their crimes.

And the summer days passed on, Charley falling deeper and deeper in love, while as the time for his return to college drew near, Lulu became more and more kind to him and treated him with a gentleness and friendliness which almost proved to him that his love was returned.

But at length the day came when they must part for a time, and it was with many good-wishes that the four boys started on their Eastern trip, Charley, in particular, looking about as disconsolate as if he were on his way to execution, but cheered somewhat at the very last by a whispered request from Lulu that he would write to her, "real soon."

They arrived in safety at their destination and were warmly welcomed by their numerous friends, who had learned of their exploits through the newspapers, which had spread the story far and wide.

The bustle and confusion incidental to settling down occupied Charley's thoughts for a few days, so that he had no time for brooding, and at length he became a full-fledged Freshman, and, although somewhat subdued, still ready for any pranks or adventures that his active mind could conceive or any other student suggest.

He seized an early opportunity of writing to Lulu, and not long after received a long letter, written in the daintiest imaginable hand, which made him love the girl more than ever, for she, softened by separation, wrote fully and freely to him, and even expressed more than she probable intended, by the use of ambiguous sentences which read two ways and which Charley interpreted according to his wishes, naturally.

But about this time an accident happened to Lil which, although it caused him severe suffering at the time, was attended with no serious lasting results, and gave him the pleasure of his father's and sister's presence at college for some weeks.

The two friends were out shooting one afternoon, looking for wild pigeons, and had met with considerable success, having secured a number of the birds, and were on their way back to college, walking side by side and talking of a dozen different things, carrying their guns on their shoulders.

They were of the old-fashioned, muzzle-loading description, for the day of breech-loaders had not yet arrived.

Suddenly, without any warning, the barrels of Lil's gun fell over his shoulder to the ground, the pin which secured them to the stock having slipped out, and the caps, striking on a flat stone which lay just behind him, exploded, discharging the gun and sending both charges of shot into his right instep, filling it full of the leaden pellets, and throwing him to the ground with the shock.

The boy was nervy to the backbone, and uttered no cry; yet Charley could see that he was suffering intense pain as he assisted him to his room, sending one of his classmates whom he met for a doctor, and, not knowing how serious the injury might be, dispatched a messenger to the nearest telegraph-station to inform Mr. Arnold of the accident; and he, accompanied by Lulu, came as quickly as steam would bring him, finding on his arrival that Lil, although confined to his bed, was in no danger.

But, much to Charley's delight, he decided to remain on indefinitely, and with his daughter took up his quarters at the hotel where Charley boarded, and where he now passed much of his spare time.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A THRILLING EXPERIENCE.

CHARLEY'S bugbear at college was the bell, which rung at half-past six every morning, awaking the boys and calling them to chapel at seven, and he determined to have one good long sleep at any rate, so decided to remove the clapper and so secrete it that it could not be found, thus necessitating the procuring of a new one, until the arrival of which the bell could not be rung.

He took no one into his confidence but Lil, who, of course, promised secrecy and eagerly seconded the idea, as he too was disturbed in the same way and thought it would be a good joke, anyhow.

The boys occupied three rooms, the central one being used as their study, while a bedroom opened from it on either side, their apartments being on the second floor, which was the top story.

They were in what was called the east wing, and at the center of the building—which consisted of two wings and a main building—was a tower, wherein hung the obnoxious bell, a rope leading down from it to the tutor's room underneath, it being part of his duty to ring the summons morning, evening, and during the day, which called the students to chapel and recitation.

Charley knew that just over his room was built the roof, and that between it and the ceiling there was ample room to walk along on the rafters and reach the bell-tower; and he then proceeded to effect an opening through the ceiling, which, composed of nothing but lath and plaster, offered no very serious obstacle.

He made a great deal of a mess, but, standing on a step-ladder, at length had pierced an opening sufficiently large to admit the passage of his body, and then, pasting a large sheet of white paper over the hole, so that only close scrutiny would reveal its presence, removed all traces of his work, and then awaited the coming of the night, as he did not intend to climb up to the bell until all was quiet.

He then went about his various occupations, chatted with Lil, took his supper calmly, and, after talking with Lulu until nearly ten o'clock, went to his room, drew a chair up in front of the fire, and sitting there thinking, recalled the fact that the tutor had met him at the hotel, with a sachel in his hand and told him he was going away for a couple of days.

"Then who's going to rout us out in the morning?" had asked the boy.

"Oh, Old Joe Bates will see that the bell is rung in time to give you plenty of leisure."

"Yes, hang him! He's as deaf as an oyster, and all the infernal clanging he makes won't disturb him a bit."

"That's so, Charley, but he'll have you up in time, probably earlier than I would."

And as Charley sat there thinking, he fell fast asleep in his easy-chair, Lil snoring away in the next room like a good fellow.

Suddenly Charley awoke with a start, being decidedly chilled, for the fire was out and he was in total darkness, the oil in the lamp having been totally consumed long before, and, groping for a match, he struck it and glanced at his watch.

"Hullo!" he muttered, "half-past four o'clock! What a nap I've had; but I could not have a better time than now to silence old Brazen-tongue, up there, so I'll start."

He then lighted a dark-lantern the boys kept for midnight excursions, took a monkey-wrench he had secured, and then, placing the ladder in position, climbed up, and disappeared through the opening, after tearing the paper, stepping out on the rafters above, and walking quickly yet quietly toward the tower where hung the bell.

A small door gave him access to this, and he was soon on the steps that led up to the platform above, over which hung the ponderous bell, and reaching it, he placed his lantern on the planks, threw the door wide open, and then surveyed the situation.

The tongue was hung on an iron pin, secured at either end by a nut, and to remove the latter he had brought the monkey-wrench, so, grasping the iron bar, he climbed up inside the bell until his feet rested on the massive knob at the bottom, and, holding on by one hand, he adjusted the wrench, and, fixing it on the nut, threw his weight upon it and tried to unscrew it; but the rust of years had set it firmly and it refused to turn.

Just as he was about to grasp the handle of the

wrench with both hands, in order to throw his whole weight on it, there was a slight trembling and a swaying and the bell began to swing to and fro, gently at first, but with an ever-increasing motion that showed somebody was pulling on the rope below, and instantly it flashed through his mind that his watch must have stopped and that it was nearly two hours later than he had thought.

He gave a tremendous yell, which was lost in the hollow throat of the bronze above him, and the swaying increased until the tongue clanged against the side of the bell with a tremendous thud, almost shaking him off, and deafening him with the clamor.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SURPRISE.

It was a terrible position that he was placed in; the edge of the bell swung so close to the platform below that any effort to escape would have crushed his body between them, so that he was forced to hang on for dear life and hope that he could retain his grasp until the awful swaying ceased.

And still the bell swung out, faster and faster, as the swaying increased, until the dizzy brain of the boy became confused and bewildered as he was enveloped in a whirlwind of crashing and thundering sounds that dazed and distracted him, while the iron bar to which he held with the tenacity of a life and death grip, dashed to and fro with sickening speed, crashing against the sides of the bell as if it would split the metal into a thousand fragments.

Faster and faster he swung, louder and louder grew the fury of the clamor, until he swung far outside the tower, through the openings in the sides and at length, as the force below increased he turned over and over, his head and then his feet in the air as the bell made a dozen complete revolutions, turning over and over again in a last final flurry of sound, until it at length began to swing more gently and at last hung motionless.

And as soon as he could somewhat recover his breath, Charley crawled out from beneath the iron monster which had so nearly crushed him, and with bleeding hands, sore and bruised body and dazed brain, he staggered down the stairs, taking his lantern and wrench with him, and finally reached his room, more dead than alive, and completely cured of any desire to remove the bell-clapper in the future.

Without disturbing Lil, he went to his own room, where he changed his clothes, washed and made himself presentable, and then, as the second bell began to toll, at the sound of which he shuddered as he recalled the narrow escape he had had, he went to chapel and thence to breakfast, where his pale appearance and his bruised hands caused many a question from Lulu, all of which he promised to answer at some future time.

That afternoon he related, in a graphic manner, his experiences to Lulu, who was visiting her brother, and Lil, and the girl's sensitive cheeks blanched more than once during the recital, as she hung breathless on the words, showing how deeply she was interested in the speaker.

For some days after, Charley was indisposed for any pranks, and passed all of his leisure time sitting with Lil and Lulu, who tried to relieve the monotony of her brother's enforced confinement by giving him as much of her society as possible, while Mr. Arnold often joined the trio and took part in the conversation.

Some time after, though, Charley, while attending a lecture on anatomy in one of the college rooms, which was illustrated by the lecturer, who used various many-colored charts, and pointed out the structure of the human body by means of a skeleton which was one of the curiosities contained in the museum, was seized with an idea, which he imparted in great confidence to Lil one evening when they were alone, and which pleased his chum mightily, although he begged Charley to wait for a time longer

until his foot was better, so that he could assist at the grand finale.

To this Charley readily consented, and when at length Lil was able to leave his room and hobble about on crutches, Charley left his apartments one night late, and going to the museum, opened the door without much difficulty, and entering, took the skeleton on his shoulder, and with the bones rattling, while the ghastly skull grinned over his back, went to the large room where their first recitation was held, and there meeting Tom and Richland, climbed into the window and deposited his burden on the floor.

Back of the platform on which stood the desk, which was occupied by the professor during recitation, was a niche or alcove in the wall, where hung a chart of the heavens, and to preserve it from dust a curtain was hung in front of it, which could be rolled up when the class was listening to the lecture on astronomy, and the different planets pointed out.

The chart was taken down from the hooks by which it was suspended, carefully rolled up and hidden away in the corner of the room, and the skeleton hung in its place, a strong cord holding it, dangling in the air, the curtain was lowered, and then, everything being restored to its normal condition, the boys left the room by the way they had entered, and retired to their room, experiencing great gratification at the anticipation of the excitement that would result when the curtain was drawn by the professor in the course of his lecture.

The next morning the class-room was well filled and among those present was Lil, who appeared at recitation for the first time in weeks, and who was warmly greeted by the professor, with whom he was a great favorite.

And when the students had settled down in their seats, their instructor began his lecture on astronomy, finally turning to the curtain and saying, as he drew the cord which rolled it up:

"From these remarks you will see that the whole universe is comparatively unknown to us, and that any maps or charts of the heavens that we are able to construct are mere skeleton—"

And as the curtain rolled up, his words stopped, his eyes stared and while the students burst into a roar of laughter that shook the ceiling and rattled the windows, he could not help joining in the outburst, so ludicrous was the scene and so aptly had his words fitted his actions, and it was some time before quiet was restored and the lecture resumed, after the chart had been hung in its proper place and the skeleton returned to the museum.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A PRACTICAL JOKE.

NOT long after this last escapade, which was the subject of many a conversation for weeks, Charley was the author of a practical joke on the president of the college, which came near resulting in his being expelled, or at least suspended for a time from the institution, so unexpectedly serious was it in its results, compared to what he had anticipated.

Lil had entirely recovered from the severe wound that he had received, and was now able to walk about without the slightest perceptible limp, although his long confinement to his room had weakened him considerably, and he was, compared to his usual weight, extraordinarily thin.

The young fellow's resemblance to his sister was something extraordinary, and he being an excellent mimic, when he put his sister's hat and veil on and disguised his voice, wrapping himself in a long shawl that completely covered him from head to foot, one could have sworn that it was his sister and not he who was present.

Witnessing this performance one evening, Charley, who had been told by Lulu that the president—an elderly man, who had never married—had been making love to her in a quiet manner, conceived a project which Lil eagerly agreed to.

So one day—it being winter, and the snow lying deep on the ground—Charley came dashing down the road which led past the president's house, seated in a light cutter, drawn by a fast trotter and by his side a dainty figure, closely wrapped in a large shawl, with a small cap on its head while a long green veil hid the features completely and was wrapped round about Lulu's head, for she it evidently was.

Speeding down the road, as they came in front of the yard of the house where the president lived, Charley drew the horse a little to one side and the sleigh, striking a drift, turned quietly over, throwing the occupants into the deep snow, while the horse, running on a little further, stopped and looked around, as if wondering what it all meant, and where the driver was.

Charley and his fair companion went head first into the snow, but he, crawling out first, went to Lulu to aid her to rise, when it was with a tremendous shock that he saw she had fainted from the fright, and, turning to look for assistance, much to his delight he saw the president, who had witnessed the accident from his window, hurrying toward him.

The inanimate form was carefully raised up and carried into the house, being laid on the sofa without giving one sign of life, and the president seemed almost wild, while Charley, chafing the hands of the fainting girl and drawing back the veil from her lips that she might breathe more freely, was soon rewarded by a slight sigh and a movement as she endeavored to sit up.

But this he prevented and, begging her to lie still, asked the president to remain with her while he went in search of her father and brother, to which the loving gentleman agreed only too readily, and, warmly grasping her hand, set about chafing it as Charley had done, while, as soon as the other had departed, he murmured words of sympathy and affection which caused the object of his admiration to hang her head in modest confusion.

She stammered and, much confused, thanked him for his kindness, acknowledging that she could not help admiring him for his devotion and his learning, and as she recovered and was able to sit up, the conversation assumed a warmer tone until she declared that it would be foolish to suppose that any one of his learning and abilities, knowledge and years, could care for a young, foolish, ignorant girl such as she.

But the president, encouraged by this timid half-avowal of her sentiments, lost his head completely, and sinking on one knee, covered her hand with kisses, and declared that if his life could be spent in endeavoring to raise her to his level—for he was a pedantic, conceited man—his happiness would be complete.

And she, glancing shyly at him, murmured a few confused words, and then, as if the ludicrousness of the situation was too much for her, threw back her head and laughed a silvery peal that disconcerted while it delighted him.

And then, as a slight tap on the window attracted her attention, she tore the veil and hat from her head, exposing to the president's astonished gaze the features of Lil, whose close-cropped hair betrayed his identity at once, while, turning and looking toward the windows, he saw, grinning like the veritable imps of mischief they were, Charley and Tom and Richland, who seemed convulsed with laughter.

And before he could utter a word, Lil, huddling his shawl under his arm, strode from the room, leaving him completely nonplused at the turn affairs had taken.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONCLUSION.

THE affair came nearly resulting seriously, for the president sought Mr. Arnold, and relating the facts to him, threatened to call a meeting of the faculty,

and, laying the case before them, demand the boys' expulsion; but when it was shown to him that nothing but ridicule for himself could come of the matter, and that, if the boys said nothing, no one would be any the wiser, he agreed to remain neutral, although he for a long time refused.

And Lil was severely lectured by his father for drawing his sister into such a scrape, but the girl, with the carelessness of youth, declared that she was glad to get rid of the attentions of the president, which were becoming tiresome; for he would take no hint, and his innate conceit led him to believe that he was irresistible.

So at length the matter was smoothed over, and no one but those immediately concerned were any the wiser, as the boys faithfully kept their promise not to divulge the matter, so that the president escaped the ridicule he feared, the boys remained at college, and Lulu was relieved of attentions which were distasteful to her.

But as the days went on, their studies began to engross more of their time, and they realized that it was important that they should do themselves justice in their classes, so that, little by little, they settled down and became more subdued, although an occasional outburst would show that the volcano was only slumbering, and ready to break out at any moment.

And at length commencement day arrived when the four friends were graduated with high honors, and at the exercises none was more conspicuous among the guests than pretty Lulu Arnold who took as much pride in the success of her brother and Charley as the boys themselves.

And finally they separated—Lil and his sister going home with their father, Charley returning to his home, and Richland and Tom promising to join him the following autumn at Lake View, where an important ceremony was to take place in October.

And when that month came a large party was assembled at the hospitable home of the Arnolds where Charley, now a member of the firm of Skylark & Son, came to carry off Lulu, who had promised him, some time before, to become his wife whenever he should come and claim her, her father consenting willingly.

And never shone sun on fairer bride or handsomer groom, and as the guests separated they only echoed the wish of the father:

"May long life and happiness attend you both!"

And in this wish, no doubt, whoever knows, or knows of, him will warmly join, for no cleverer fellow lives to-day than Charley Skylark, no gentler woman than Lulu, his wife.

THE END.

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